

Missing feared dead

Harold Koi

Monday, October 05, 2009

SAMOAN authorities fear the missing are dead but have vowed to continue their search and rescue operations.

Speaking from the command centre at Lolomanu Village in Samoa yesterday, the Commander of Operations, Senior Inspector Seaga Willie Lafaele, said they discovered more dead bodies stuck between debris yesterday along the coast.

Inspector Lafaele said Lolomanu Village on Upolu Island was one of the worse villages affected and the community health centre was also torn to pieces. He said he could not disclose how many people were missing at this stage but reserved comment until after the operations.

Inspector Lafaele said they feared the worse for those missing which included women and children.

He said the Australia and the New Zealand Navy have been in Samoa since Tuesday to help.

"Local heavy machines companies have also jumped in with their bulldozers and tractors to help search and rescue teams," Mr Lafaele said.

"The tsunami destroyed transmission lines and Lolomanu is without water and electricity.

"We have to fetch water from villages that were unaffected.

"The only hospital at Lolomanu has been destroyed and we have set up a temporary hospital," he said.

The worse areas affected were Aleipata and Falealili districts.

Agence France-Presse reports officials confirmed the death toll from the devastating tsunami that crashed into the Samoa islands and Tonga has risen to 170 with at least 10 people unaccounted for.

There were 129 dead in Samoa, 32 in American Samoa and nine people killed in Tonga.

A magnitude 8.3 earthquake just before 7am on Wednesday (Fiji time) triggered waves which, according to survivors, rose nine metres (30feet) as they pounded coastal settlements.

The 10 missing in Samoa are feared to have died, which would raise the overall toll to 180.

"These are the ones who were swept out to sea or are buried under debris," said Vaosa Epa of the National Disaster Council.

She said police collated the number of missing people from interviewing families in the villages destroyed.