

LATEST NEWS # 421, June 28, 2007

The following news concerns the South Pacific.

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Call for help for the people of the Solomon Islands

SOUTH PACIFIC — “This disaster is going to impact the translation and literacy project in a very big way.” Translator Alpheaus Zobule clearly has no doubt that the impact of the tsunami that hit parts of the Solomon Islands in April will continue to be felt for many years to come. But as the human and economic cost of the tsunami continues to be calculated, plans are being drawn up by a number of different organisations, including the Bible Society in the South Pacific, to provide practical assistance.



Mr Zobule, currently a doctoral candidate in biblical studies at Union Theological Seminary and Presbyterian School of Christian Education in Richmond, Virginia, grew up in a subsistence farming family on Ranonga, a remote island even by the standards of the Solomon Islands. When the tsunami hit this island of 5,000 people on April 2, some 120 of the 180 homes in his village of Lale were destroyed. Similar damage was caused elsewhere on Ranonga and on other islands in the region. In total, some 50 people were killed and around 6,000 homes destroyed. In addition, many people retreated to temporary camps on higher ground, fearing another tsunami.

As well as creating practical problems such as housing, disease, food and water, the tsunami will leave a significant social legacy in terms of hampering literacy development, according to Mr Zobule, who is set to become the first Pacific islander to work as a United Bible Societies Translation Consultant in the South Pacific. He served his ‘apprenticeship’ as a translator on the project to translate the New Testament into Lungga, the local language on Ranonga. Since its launch in 2004 (see *World Report* 388/20), this translation and the linguistic materials developed by Mr Zobule as part of the project have played a significant role in literacy teaching in Lungga. Now, though, Mr Zobule’s materials have been lost, along with many copies of the New Testament.

“This will be a challenge over the next few years,” he said on hearing the news. “The literacy program we are running cannot continue under these circumstances.”

In response to the loss of Scriptures resulting from the tsunami, the Bible Society hopes – at a cost of \$20,000 – to distribute 2,000 English Bibles, 3,000 New Testaments, 10,000 New Reader Portions and 5,000 tracts among 9,000 people on Ranonga and other affected islands.

“We believe that, through this distribution, people will find answers to suffering in God’s Word,” it says.

Assistance is also set to come to people who have lost their homes and their source of income through Grace Covenant Presbyterian church in Richmond, which Mr Zobule currently attends. As of June 15, this church had received donations totalling US\$16,500 from other churches across the US, according to a report in the *Washington Post*. This money will be sent to Islands Bible Ministries, a development organisation founded by Mr Zobule.

This report refers to project 86411, for which funding is being sought.

Photo (Bible Society in the South Pacific):

SPA07DJ-5: Damage to the hospital on the island of Gizo caused by the tsunami that hit some parts of the Solomon Islands in April 2007.

For further information please contact comms@ubs-wsc.org