

## Seismologist warns powerful earthquake a warning for the Caribbean

The Director of the Seismic Research Unit of the University of the West Indies, Dr. Joan Latchman says Tuesday's 6.4 magnitude earthquake is the "biggest" to occur in the Barbados zone since 1980 and warned regional countries to be prepared for a massive quake in the future.

"This would be an earthquake we don't expect to see for tens of years... In my analysis this would be the first earthquake in this magnitude range since we have been recording about 1980," she said of the quake that was felt in Barbados, Martinique, Dominica, Grenada, St. Lucia and St. Vincent and the Grenadines. The seismologist said that the strong quake was also a reminder that the Caribbean should not to be complacent. "The region generates very large magnitude earthquakes. This is not a very large magnitude earthquake. This is described as a strong earthquake because the rate at which the plates that are giving rise to the earthquakes that we experience are among the slowest in the world, the return period for our very large earthquakes is long, long enough for people to become complacent that such big earthquakes don't happen." "This earthquake is reminding us that the processes which generate these large earthquakes are alive and well. They are continuing. And therefore we need to be prepared," Latchman told the Caribbean Media Corporation (CMC). She said that since the start of the year, the region has recorded an increase in seismic activity. "We have been seeing elevated activities in our region in the Trinidad area and in the Antigua area. So yes, our regions have been showing particular zones. Even east of St. Lucia we have been tracking a little elevation. So there are little zones that are manifesting elevation." The seismologist, who has long warned the region to expect a massive earthquake, cautioned this could still occur and insisted that Caribbean countries must be earthquake ready. "Every day that passes the occurrence of that earthquake is closer to us. And certainly the activity that we are seeing in the region is a cause for concern that this earthquake may be a little sooner than later." "But of course we are unable to give a date, time and place because there are a number of areas along the Eastern Caribbean Arc in which this earthquake can occur. We have had our major earthquakes between Antigua and Barbuda and north of Martinique and north west of St. Lucia and north west of the Paria Peninsula and so it's got a big choice." "And so all of us in all our countries we need to be prepared because we do not know just where this big earthquake will occur. But what we do know no matter where it occurs because earthquake waves travel it means that even if you are 200 kilometers away from that big earthquake you can experience significant tremors. Latchman said that while earthquakes in the Barbados zone are "a little different from what we would have along the islands of the Eastern Caribbean where the earthquakes occur in a denser pattern... we would expect to see on average, every year, an earthquake in the magnitude 4.1 to 4.5 range and 5 of them in the 3.6 to 4.0 range." She said most of these earthquakes "occur very close to the island of Barbados." "So Barbadians should not have a complacency that earthquakes in the Eastern Caribbean do not affect them. An earthquake along the arc just needs to be large enough and in 2007 most Barbadians would have felt the earthquake that was located north of Martinique at a magnitude 7.3 and caused damaged in Barbados," she said, noting that in 1953 the earthquake that occurred north west of St. Lucia also caused damaged in Barbados. "So Barbados has had impact from earthquakes in the past and I am convinced that Barbados will have impact from earthquakes in the future." She said she was urging Caribbean nationals to visit the Unit's website in order to get up to date information on earthquakes and even tsunamis.