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## SUCCESS STORY

# Strengthening Response Readiness in Chile

**USAID-supported DRR programs in Chile helped ONEMI respond rapidly and effectively to a magnitude 8.3 earthquake and tsunami in September 2015.**



Photo credit: U.S. Embassy in Santiago

*Chilean President Michelle Bachelet invited U.S. Ambassador Michael A. Hammer (center) and USAID's Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA) Senior Regional Advisor Tim Callaghan (left) to her offices in September 2015 to thank the United States for its support in improving Chilean disaster response capacity and to discuss the next phase of disaster preparedness planning.*

USAID has partnered with the Government of Chile (GoC) for more than two decades to strengthen the GoC's ability to prepare for and respond to natural disasters. Following a magnitude 8.8 earthquake and resultant tsunami that caused more than 500 deaths in Chile in 2010, USAID began focusing its disaster risk reduction (DRR) efforts on working with the GoC to bolster its tsunami preparedness capacity and establish a national seismic monitoring system that also contributes to tsunami forecasting.

USAID has also supported trainings for emergency responders in Chile that increased emergency preparedness and enhanced skills in medical first response, urban search and rescue (USAR), and coordination during a disaster. Between 2010 and 2014, USAID and Chile's National Emergency Management Office (ONEMI) trained more than 1,000 professional and volunteer responders and formed a cadre of approximately 140 responders capable of training their colleagues.

The collaboration between USAID and the GoC has proven effective. On September 16, 2015, a magnitude 8.3 earthquake struck central Chile, triggering a tsunami and testing the GoC's response capacity. Employing the seismic monitoring system developed with USAID support, ONEMI reacted quickly and effectively, issuing a tsunami warning and evacuating up to 1 million people from coastal areas, undoubtedly saving lives. ONEMI led the earthquake and tsunami response without international assistance, with fewer than 30 casualties reported.

USAID plans to continue working with the GoC to further strengthen its disaster response capacity. Shortly after the September earthquake, USAID supported the 2015 Regional Earthquake Response Simulation Exercise (SIMEX) in Chile's capital city of Santiago. Hosted by ONEMI and led by the UN International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG), SIMEX strengthened first responders' ability to conduct USAR operations and coordinate effectively with relief agencies during an earthquake response. In consultation with Chilean counterparts, USAID is developing a five-year DRR plan that includes activities such as increasing disaster preparedness in urban areas and strengthening early warning systems.