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## Pacific Partnership Enhances PNG Disaster Preparedness

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The United States Navy-led Pacific Partnership 2025 mission has returned to Papua New Guinea with a renewed focus on disaster response and regional cooperation. Arriving in Lae on July 26 aboard the USS Pearl Harbor, the Harpers Ferry–class dock landing ship, the mission marks the 21st iteration of the largest annual humanitarian assistance and disaster response operation in the Indo-Pacific. The deployment includes personnel from Australia, Canada, Germany, Japan, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea, Singapore, and the United Kingdom, alongside U.S. forces.

The mission aims to build disaster preparedness and strengthen interoperability among host and partner nations. In Lae and Port Moresby, Pacific Partnership specialists are conducting disaster management workshops, medical exchanges, community education,

and infrastructure repairs. A notable focus has been on environmental health, medical readiness, and public health resilience.

A disaster management and Women, Peace and Security symposium in Morobe Province emphasized inclusive community engagement. United States Navy Lieutenant Junior Grade Taylor Coles, an entomologist specializing in malaria transmission, highlighted the importance of reducing stagnant water to prevent vector-borne diseases. RAAF Flight Lieutenant Kimi Ricketts also contributed expertise on environmental sanitation and hygiene in resource-constrained settings. Their collaboration sparked meaningful dialogue with local communities.

The mission also includes tangible community improvements such as refurbishing a local dental clinic in Lae and constructing a pergola at the facility. These efforts are complemented by cultural exchanges, including performances by the U.S. Pacific Fleet Band alongside musicians from partner countries.

Captain Mark Stefanik, Mission Commander, emphasized that the mission is about building collective capacity. He noted that Pacific Partnership promotes collaboration with regional allies to better respond to crises. The Australian Defence Force also played a significant role, deploying a team of five personnel aboard the USS Pearl Harbor and another vessel, contributing to workshops on disaster response, medical support, environmental health, gender and security, and civil-military coordination.

Colonel Craig Solomon of the Papua New Guinea Defence Force reaffirmed the shared goal of improving regional stability and preparedness. While some critics question the long-term impact of short-term engagements, the mission builds on a Defense Cooperation Agreement and deepens U.S.–PNG ties. Pacific Partnership 2025 will continue its deployment with visits to Micronesia and Samoa, scheduled through November.