



GOVERNMENT OF TONGA

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

(21<sup>st</sup> January, 2022)

### **“Second Official Update of the Hunga-Tonga-Hunga-Ha’apai Volcanic Eruption”**

Initial international humanitarian support has reached the Kingdom of Tonga only 5 days after the Hunga-Tonga-Hunga Ha’apai volcanic eruption on Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> January, 2022. Ash-fall and a tsunami from the volcanic eruption affected an estimated 84% of the population of Tonga covering the whole of Tonga. Initial Damage Assessment teams are conducting visits and aerial surveys of Tonga.

His Majesty’s Government understands the concerns of the Tongan diaspora for the welfare of their families and loved ones in Tonga and will endeavour to do its utmost to ensure that relevant information is made available and shared during this challenging time.

His Majesty’s Armed Forces naval vessels *VOEA Ngahau Koula* and *VOEA Ngahau Siliva* returned to Tongatapu on the 20<sup>th</sup> of January, bringing back the medical team that was dispatched to Ha’apai on the Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> and Tuesday the 18<sup>th</sup> of January and one injured person who required emergency medical treatment. There were 8 reported injuries on Nomuka Island, 4 minor injuries on Fonoï Island and 2 minor injuries on Tungua Island. A field hospital is now set up on Nomuka as the health centre was washed away by the tsunami. The main hospital at Pangai, Princess Fusipala Hospital, remains operational with no major injuries reported. The *VOEA Ngahau Siliva* departed today to the island of ‘Eua with emergency relief supplies.

Ms. Lataimaumi Lauaki, a 49-year-old female from Nomuka and Mr. Telai Tutu’ila a 65-year old male from Mango Island (Telai Tutu’ila) and a British national were victims of the tsunami. Ms. Lataimaumi Lauaki was buried on Monday 17<sup>th</sup> of January, 2022 on Nomuka and Mr. Telai Tutu’ila was buried on Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> January, 2022 on Mango.

Inter-island communication remains an acute challenge. Limited telephone connections are now re-established with Niuafou’ou and Niuatoputapu; Satellite and High Frequency (HF) Radio communication have been re-established with Vava’u, Niuafou’ou and Ha’apai; and plans are underway to set up a HF radio Station on Niuatoputapu. Limited international phone calls are now possible and communication operators are working with Government to urgently restore full services. A New Zealand relief flight arrived with much needed telecommunications equipment to re-establish limited internet connection. A vessel is expected to reach Tonga in the next few days to repair the fibre-optic cable that was severed by the tsunami.

Food rations, water and relief items including dignity kits, hygiene kits and tents are being distributed to the affected areas such as Kanokupolu and Patangata on Tongatapu. Sixty-two persons living on Mango were relocated to Nomuka after losing their homes and all of their personal belongings. It is

envisaged that these displaced persons will be relocated to Tongatapu given the current food and water shortages on Nomuka.

Water supplies have been tested: ground water and clean rainwater are safe to drink.

The National Emergency Operations Centre (NEOC) noted that water remains their main request. To date, the National Emergency Management Office (NEMO) have distributed 59,959 litres of water as part of their on-going relief efforts. The HN WASH CLUSTER continues to monitor public health to minimize risks

Although there has been no further volcanic activity, challenges to sea transportation remain as fallout on the surface of the ocean is causing damage to the vessels.

Domestic flights remain suspended although reconnaissance flights are being made as runways are being cleared of ash and debris. International flights from Australia and New Zealand have landed over the last few days with much needed emergency relief supplies. They have also conducted aerial surveys of the volcano and taken photos to determine the extent of the damage caused by the eruption.

The HMNZS Wellington has arrived for a hydrographic survey with diving teams and a SH-201 Seasprite helicopter. The HMNZS Aotearoa has also arrived with bulk water supplies and relief stores. Australia's HMAS Adelaide set sail from Brisbane today with an estimated 250,000 litres of bulk water supplies and relief stores and is expected to reach Tonga's shores early next week.

The volcanic eruption has triggered support of US\$8million from the World Bank and US\$10million from the Asian Development Bank. Australia has committed AU\$1million, Japan has committed US\$1million and the People's Republic of China has provided an initial assistance of US\$100,000. The provision of relief items from New Zealand and Australia have been delivered on a contact-less basis due to COVID-19 restrictions. The provision of further relief items to be delivered from Japan and the People's Republic of China will observe the same contact-less protocols.

His Majesty's Government is deeply appreciative to the international community for their generous and timely assistance in response to this unprecedented event.

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