

Situation Overview

On 19 January, 2022, the UN Resident Coordinator received a request from the Government of **Tonga** for urgent assistance in the wake of the volcanic eruption and the impact of the following *tsunami* and volcanic ash it generated.

Initial Damage Assessments (IDAs) are being conducted on the main island Tongatapu (with the capital Nuku'alofa) as well as on islands of the Ha'apai group by Tonga's National Emergency Management Office (NEMO) and partners such as the *Tongan Red Cross Society*. Data are being analyzed.

Most parts of the country, including remote and isolated islands, have been visited by assessment teams. Positive news is that besides the three fatalities mentioned yesterday, no further deaths have been reported.

There are still serious concerns about access to safe water throughout the island nation, and concerns about the quality of groundwater in Tongatapu. Local and international partners are working hard to address these issues. Water as well as water purification units and desalination equipment are being shipped to Tonga as we speak.

There are also reports of a fuel shortage but petrol supplies are coming as part of regular shipment and with some additional Australian support.

There is still limited international connectivity although the situation is gradually improving. There are various initiatives from the Tongan Government via the UN International Telecommunication Union (ITU), phone capability from New Zealand and other donor partners, as well as Digicel. There is a ship *en route* from PNG to fix the underwater communication cable, although this might take a couple of weeks to complete. Communication with outer islands still remains very limited.

Fua'amotu International Airport is operational, the cleaning of ash has been concluded. Relief flights arrived from **New Zealand** and **Australia** today (more details under *Partner Action*). A domestic flight has gone to Ha'apai, indicating that earlier information was correct that this airport is also working.

Humanitarian Needs and Response

NEMO and humanitarian partners on the ground continued IDAs and data assessments. The most pressing needs are the availability of safe water, not only on the main island Tongatapu but also on smaller islands in the country, particularly in the Ha'apai group.

NEMO and other First Responders such as His Majesty's Armed Forces, the Tonga Police and the Tonga Fire and Emergency Services, together with the Tongan Red Cross and other humanitarian partners are distributing clean water and non-food items in Tongatapu and other areas.

Initial assessment data for shelter from Tongatapu indicate that so far five communities have been identified as having suffered significant damage to households in coastal areas: 'Ahau, 'Atata, 'Eueiki, Kanokupolu, and Patangata. 31 houses are completely damaged, 72 severely, 46 moderately, and 23 minor. In 'Eua, two houses are completely damaged, 45 severely, and 28 moderately.

On 19 January, 2022, NEMO provided relief items to approx. 100 most-affected households in Ha'apai. The assistance included 100 hygiene kits, 100 kitchen kits, 100 tarpaulins, 45 tents, and 02 desalination units plus food items such as tinned fish, tinned corned beef, crackers, flour, and sugar and adequate amount of potable water.

As concerns Water, Sanitation & Hygiene (WASH), data suggest that some 50,000 people are affected and access to drinking water remains one of the highest priorities. The capital's water supply is safe to drink but most people now rely on bottled water. Authorities have advised residents against drinking rainwater until further information is available. Oxfam is operating a water treatment unit. Water quality testing is ongoing.

The Tonga Food Security Cluster is conducting IDAs and results are expected tomorrow. It is estimated that some 12,000 households have been affected as all agricultural sectors (crops, livestock, fisheries) suffered substantially. Of particular concern is the effect of ashfall on crops along with saltwater intrusion and the potential of acid rain. It is further estimated that about 60 – 70 percent of livestock-rearing households either had livestock perished, experienced damage to grazing land, or have contaminated water supplies. Fisheries of coastal areas have been significantly affected and the government advised against fishing or consuming fish.

As regards Health, the hospital and the national pharmacy store in the capital are intact and fully functioning. There are some reports of damage to some health centres in Tongatapu, 'Eua and Ha'apai. TEMAT left some medical staff in Ha'apai but most team members returned to Tongatapu. TEMAT was operating a mobile clinic which is being stood down. The main issue going forward is monitoring the risk of infectious diseases through surveillance and the actions underway by the WASH sector.

The Pacific Logistics Cluster is organizing the movement of communication gear and Mobile Storage Units to Tonga in partnership with DFAT and works with partners to coordinate existing transport options.

The Emergency Telecommunications Cluster is coordinating with local, regional and global partners including the University of the South Pacific (USP), RedR, the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), and Telecoms Sans Frontieres (TSF) to deploying small satellite terminals for internet connectivity from Fiji to Tonga, via a landing state in Brisbane set up as part of the regional preparedness to overcome communication challenges currently existing.

Partner Action

New Zealand: With the airport in the capital operational, one flight from New Zealand was able to land in Tonga. It brought humanitarian and disaster relief supplies, including water containers, kits for temporary shelters, generators, hygiene and family kits, and communication equipment. The delivery was “contactless”, due to strict COVID protocols. Two ships are currently on their way; one, the HMS Wellington, should arrive later today, the other, HMS Aotearoa, tomorrow. HMS Wellington will check shipping channels and wharf approaches to ensure vessels can go alongside and to check the structural integrity of the wharf. Aerial surveillance data from the second surveillance flight has been provided to the Government of Tonga.

Australia: One flight with humanitarian and relief items, communication equipment and PPEs for ash clean-up operations arrived in Nuku'alofa today. *HMAS Adelaide* is leaving for Tonga tonight; arriving in about five to six days. It carries relief items from DFAT, humanitarian partners like UNICEF, water purification units, as well as industrial cleaning equipment and tools for ash removal.

Japan: Further to the information reported yesterday, Japan announced it will provide Emergency Grant Aid of more than USD 1 million to Tonga which will be provided directly to the government or channeled through international organizations. The Government of Japan is also planning to send drinking water, equipment to remove volcanic ash and other relief supplies, and mobilizing Japan Self Defense Forces. All in close cooperation with Australia and New Zealand.

The Pacific Humanitarian Team carried out a Donor briefing today. All donors expressed strong support for Tonga and its people and are ready to assist either financially and/or in-kind. Highlights included: **Australia AUD 1 million; New Zealand NZD 1 million; Japan USD 1 million; United States USD 100,000; China USD 100,000; Norway USD 50,000; World Bank USD 8 million; Asian Development Bank USD 10 million.**