



MINISTRY OF RURAL AND MARITIME DEVELOPMENT AND DISASTER MANAGEMENT

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**** For Immediate Release ****

"It was a short time for us to do a fundraiser, but the outcome was just amazing. It goes to show that as neighboring countries, we are always here for each other and that is the feeling that we got."

These were the sentiments shared by the Tongan community executive member Ms. Sina Kami as Government concluded its joint Fiji-Tonga Relief mission.

This week, the Fijian Government successfully executed its second ever humanitarian deployment to the region to assist victims of the recent volcanic eruption and tsunami in Tonga.

Through the support of key donor and development partners such as the New Zealand Government, UNICEF, the Fiji Council of Social Services (FCOSS), the private sector, faith based organisations, the Tongan community in Fiji, non-government organisations (NGOs) and civil society groups, Government was able to coordinate the shipment of 11 40ft containers that carried more than 200 tonnes of humanitarian supplies to Tonga.

This regional deployment was the second Government led disaster response mission since TC Pam in Vanuatu in March 2015, where a 50-member team comprising of engineers from the Republic of the Fiji Military Forces (RFMF), the Ministry of Health, the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) and other relevant agencies was deployed to Port Vila to assist authorities in the aftermath of the Category 5 cyclone.

The deployment of a Government team to Tonga was extraordinary this time around, noting that COVID-19 became the new element that needed to be integrated into our operational planning for this mission.

Additionally, Government had only just completed the delivery of its immediate relief assistance for TC Cody when the eruption of the Hunga Tonga Hunga Ha'apai volcano took place. During the same period, the NDMO also completed damage assessments and distribution of relief supplies to the Divisions affected by TC Cody. However, these factors did not deter Government from stepping in to assist.

NDMO Director Ms. Vasiti Soko said that as the closest neighboring Pacific island nation, Fiji had a responsibility to be among the first Pacific Island countries to deliver the much needed relief to Tonga.

On Tuesday, a 13-member team deployed onboard a Government chartered vessel safely reached Nuku'alofa where the humanitarian supplies were offloaded in a massive contactless exercise. In line with COVID-19 protocols in place by the Fijian and the Tongan authorities, the handover was conducted under strict adherence to COVID-19 protocols.

The humanitarian supplies were handed over to the Tongan National Emergency Management Office (NEMO) who have expressed their gratitude and acknowledgment towards the assistance rendered by the Fijian Government.

Ms Kami conveyed the Tongan community's gratitude and acknowledgement for the much needed support offered by Government.

"We'd like to thank the Government, the NDMO and team and all partners who made all this possible. It was not just containers filled with crackers, but they were containers filled with love. Overall, we thank Government for making the shipment possible for Tonga," Ms Kami said.

Ms Kami added that although they initially knew Government would come forward to assist the victims of the recent disaster in Tonga, they however did not expect to receive a call from the NDMO to inform them of the availability of containers allocated specifically for the Tongan community in Fiji.

"From the Tongan community, we just want to say thank you for all those who were involved. Even the Minister was there to send off the boat and everyone was just emotional."

Minister for Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management Hon. Inia Seruiratu said this deployment was a portrayal of the true spirit of Pacific regionalism.

"This is what meaningful partnerships are all about," he said.

"As I had alluded to earlier, Government is indeed grateful to be able to work with all our partners to make this deployment possible. We know the recent months had not been easy for us all, but I wish to once again acknowledge our humanitarian and donor partners for their support towards this deployment," Minister Seruiratu said.

"I know we are vulnerable in the Pacific, but we are resilient people. I am confident that the Kingdom will bounce back to normalcy."

The team deployed to Tonga returned to Suva on Thursday.

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For press enquiries:

Aqela Susu, MRMDDM, Tel. +679 3216456/+679 9985670 , aqela.susu@govnet.gov.fj