



MINISTRY OF RURAL AND MARITIME DEVELOPMENT AND DISASTER MANAGEMENT

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**** For Immediate Release ****

Relief supplies distributed to affected Lau islands



Caption: *The Government team led by Minister for Infrastructure and Meteorological Services Hon. Jone Usamate are checked by health personnel before proceeding with their visit to Vatoa in Lau earlier today.*

SUVA – Relief supplies deployed as part of Government's immediate response to the islands impacted by the recent volcanic eruption in Tonga have been well received by villagers visited by the Government teams onboard the MV Iloilovatu.

The team, led by Minister for Infrastructure and Meteorological Services Hon. Jone Usamate and Assistant Minister for Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management Hon. Vijay Nath made their first stop at the villages of Nukuni and Matokana in Ono-I-Lau on Saturday.

Today, the team made their second stop at Vatoa with much needed relief supplies and food rations to help the villagers in the immediate aftermath of the storm surge that swept through the village more than a week ago.

Vatoa Village headman Mr. Maciu Tuicake said the villagers were thankful with the outpouring of support shown by Government during their visit.

“We would like to thank the Fijian Government for helping us with food and water today,” he said.

Mr Tuicake said the villagers were still trying to come to terms with the events that happened on the particular Saturday afternoon that the Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha'apai volcano erupted.

“I was at home when a sudden bomb-like sound went off. It was as if it was just meters away from me. I called a Government official in Suva to seek advice as I did not know what had happened. He told me that it's from a volcanic eruption in Tonga. We got prepared should there be a tsunami, but thank God, it did not do much damage here in Vatoa. The eruption started at 4:15pm,” Mr Tuicake said.

Hon. Nath said the Government team had been moved by the resilience continuously shown the villages in the affected islands in Lau.

“The resilience shown by these villagers are unmatched. Just days after the ordeal, we were told they gathered to clean up their village. When we visited, it was as if nothing had happened. That is truly the way we should build back better from any disaster,” Hon. Nath said.

National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) Director Ms. Vasiti Soko said while the teams of scientific expertise have been conducting assessments in these affected islands, reports from the ground indicate minimal damage to infrastructure.

“Water PH has been assessed and found to be within the normal range. Villagers have also cleaned up their compounds when the Government team arrived so there were no visibility of severe damages on the two islands. Food rations were also distributed by the teams and I'm glad to say that villagers were thankful upon receiving items during the visits by the Government teams,” Ms Soko said.

Meanwhile, the Government team deployed onboard the MLC Veivueti had visited Lakeba and Vanuabalavu yesterday. Today the team was at Yasayasa Moala where they also continued with food ration and relief items distribution and assessments.



Caption: Minister for Infrastructure and Meteorological Services Hon. Jone Usamate and the Government team onboard the MV Iloilovatu arrive at Nukuni Village in Ono-I-Lau with much needed relief supplies on Saturday.

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