

SPECIAL EDITION

His Majesty King Tupou VI addresses the nation

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Remarks of the Ombudsman



We congratulate the new Prime Minister and his Government for the efficient and effective response to this "double whammy." Your leadership has encouraged the community to step up and build again.

We also acknowledge and thank all regional and global messages of support, encouragement and offer of help for Tonga Ombudsman operations. In particular, Chris Field, President of IOI, Judge Boshier and APOR Offices throughout Asia and the Pacific.

These major natural disasters test our resilience and augments our resolve for "resilience through good governance."

'Ofa atu,
Mr. 'Aisea Taumoepeau, SC.
Ombudsman

NZ Chief Ombudsman's support



The Chief Ombudsman of New Zealand, Judge Boshier, (left) had sent words of encouragement to the Ombudsman of Tonga, Mr. 'Aisea Taumoepeau, SC., following the tsunami that people are still reeling from.

"Our thoughts are with His Majesty King Tupou VI, the Royal Family, the leadership of Tonga and the *fonua* and people of the kingdom at this disastrous time. I hope you, 'Alisi, your family and team are all safe and well, though the widespread loss and ongoing challenging conditions must be terribly difficult. My staff and I are keeping a close eye on the news coming out of Tonga," Judge Boshier writes.

He also said that his Tongan staff are deeply concern for the hardships Tonga currently faces "but are comforted by their faith and understanding of the astute strength and collective instinct of the Tongan people. I can only imagine how heart breaking the impact of this catastrophic event must be for you all in Tonga." The Chief Ombudsman of New Zealand also said that he and his staff are making donations to the appeals to help Tonga. @OMBTonga.



His Majesty, King Tupou VI

Following the unprecedented volcanic eruption and tsunami of Saturday evening, 15th January, 2022, His Majesty addressed the nation on Saturday, 22nd January, with Psalms 36: 5 & 7 "Thy mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens; and thy faithfulness reaches unto the clouds. How excellent is thy loving kindness; O God! Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings."

He emphasized how the nation is so vulnerable to natural disasters and how the effects of the tsunami that have washed away some of the islands, people's homes, crops and properties, and damaged the environment. Displaced people need to be resettled.

He was thankful that there is minimal loss of lives. "At the same time we now face new challenges," the King said. He commended the relief effort by the HMAF naval boats in saving and transporting displaced people from the affected islands, while the boats struggled with engine problems caused by the pumice.

The King noted the different priority needs of islands most affected. 'Eua is most concerned with damage to their wharf; the islands of Mango, Fonoifua and Nomukeiki overwhelmed by the tsunami prioritized resettlement.

His Majesty called on everyone's cooperation, government, churches, businesses, non-government organizations, to unite in this challenging time.

He closed with Hymn 652 of the Free Wesleyan Church: "Ko e Pale-tu'a 'a hotau 'Otua."

"... 'E, te Ne tauhi koe 'oua 'e tala'a
'Oka kuo ofi ke tō pe ho la'a:
Kā, lolotonga ho fou he tele'a
Ko e toki ofi mo'oni pē ia"

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OMB Office begins new year with all staff devotion



Fr. 'Ekuasi Manu (4th from left), Ombudsman, Mr. 'Aisea Taumoepeau, SC. (middle), CEO & Staff of the Office of the Ombudsman.

The beginning of the 2022 official service of the Office of the Ombudsman brings a new spirit and life to sustain another year of dedication and commitment. There is a new revitalization of life full of great hopes and new energy.

Father 'Ekuasi Manu, Principal of 'Apifo'ou College, made the encouragement while leading the first prayer service of the office on Thursday, 13th January. Fr. Manu based his encouragement from the Book of Job, seemingly to prepare all staff members for an unforeseen circumstance such as the volcanic eruption-triggered tsunami of January 15th.

He highlighted that Job has been a "very richly blessed person, material-wise. But then, it was all removed from him. Everything was destroyed including his children. This shows that Job was resilient to such disastrous encounters.

"Job seems to just maintain fidelity through it all despite those massive losses ... but it never dawned on him to curse God.

"Through whatever circumstances in life that you may encounter, just hold on to the principles that are dearest to you. And I think in your line of service, and I know this should resonate with you in your line of work – the complaints, tests, triumphs and trials – like Job at the end, despite the challenges, just hold on firmly to the core principles to make this Office of the Ombudsman of Tonga stand firm and steady during difficult time.

"Any structure, and even within the law and whatever it is making it difficult for people to, I think we are playing a role here that could free them, to liberate the people to move on to a more decent and successful life," Fr. Manu stressed. @OMBTonga.

OMB Operation during State of Emergency (Policy Section 19.3(2))

The Ombudsman, Mr. 'Aisea Taumoepeau, and management acted quickly on Monday, 17th January, in order to ensure the safety of all staff members following the tsunami of Saturday, 15th January.

Staff were advised to remain at home on Monday, 17th, instead of reporting to work. The management held an emergency meeting and informed staff on the same day to still remain at home and ensure their families are all well until further notice. Only informed essential staff was notified to report to the office. The direction was reviewed on Wednesday and Friday, 19th and 21st January. All staff members were advised to resume duty on Monday, 24th January.

The islands of Tongatapu, Ha'apai and 'Eua have all been covered by black volcanic ash from the eruption of Hunga Tonga and Hunga Ha'apai.

Right: The Ombudsman, Mr. 'Aisea Taumoepeau, SC., the CEO and management holding emergency meeting on Monday, 17th January, 2022.



Due to the communication blackout severing telephone and internet links with the outer islands, the Director of Investigation, Roman Vaihū, travelled to Vava'u as soon as domestic flights resumed to survey Vava'u office, staff and also attended to current cases.

Mr. Vaihū reported upon his return that "both officers are well and business proceeds as normal apart from communications breakdown." People need to report in person to the office should they wish to enquire or lodge a formal complaint. @OMBTonga.



Above: Earlier volcanic activity at Hunga Tonga & Hunga Ha'apai before the major eruption and tsunami of Saturday, 15th January, 2022.

(PC: Supplied)

Emergency Orders of Government on COVID-19 and Volcanic Tsunami Disaster

The Government of Tonga had immediately imposed another National Emergency Declaration following the unprecedented tsunami of Saturday, 15th January. This time, it was to protect all citizens from the aftermath of the destructive nature of the tsunami, triggered by the volcanic eruptions from Hunga Tonga and Hunga Ha'apai. Communications through internet and telephones with the outside world have also been severed by these natural disasters.

The new declaration was the second to be imposed while the nation was still observing the initial national emergency declaration on COVID-19. These declarations ensure that despite the tsunami, government is still committed to protect the people from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Meanwhile, government had relocated to the capital, Nuku'alofa, the affected people from the small and low-lying islands of Mango and Nomuka in the Ha'apai group, as well as the island of 'Atatā. About 62 people from Nomuka and Mango, including women, children and babies, are being housed temporary at the hall of the FWC of Longolongo. They were evacuated by the HMAF vessels.

Damaged water-tanks, Ha'apai.



Above: Men rescuing a wheelchair-bound person, Ha'apai. (PC: Courtesy of TV Tonga.)



The people are being looked after by the government through the National Emergency Management Office (NEMO) as well as the Tonga Red Cross Society and other organizations. Families, relatives and members of the public have donated food items, clothing, hygienic and dignity kits and special needed items for children and babies as well as nursing mothers.

Rev. Kisina Toetu'u (at left) and Mrs. Mē 'Aholelei of the Office of the Ombudsman.



Staff of the Office of the Ombudsman have voluntarily donated basic and essential items for some of the displaced mothers, their children and babies. This goodwill gesture was supported by all the staff of the Office. Staff members, Mē 'Aholelei, Pitisi Helu and Paula Mafi presented the items to one of the mothers at the hall. The mother is among a group of 62 people evacuated from Mango Island after the tsunami, including Rev. Kisina Toetu'u of the FWC. ©OMBTonga.



The seven (7) principles of Good Governance being promoted to guide the services and administrative decisions of the government are the—Rule of Law, Independent, Integrity, Transparency, Effective and Efficient, Accountability & Clarity of Purpose. For more information, call us toll-free on 0800 662 or email—investigation@ombudsman.to or reach us via Facebook Messenger on our page—Office of the Ombudsman. Our website is www.ombudsman.to.

“Sailing into the Tsunami” – Tieni Lisala’s first account experience, ‘Atatā island

She is just 32 years of age and a woman. But Tieni Lisala (*pictured at right*) is no stranger to the ocean. She has frequently travelled between Tongatapu and



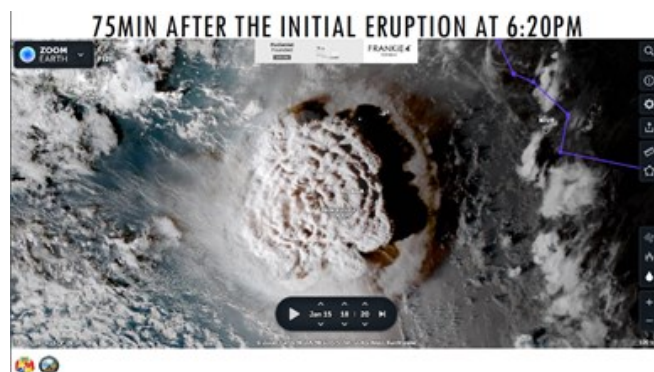
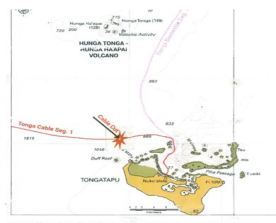
her island of origin, ‘Atatā, to the west of the Nuku’alofa coasts. Tieni has emerged courageously, but thankfully, following her ordeal at sea during the tsunami while trying to reach her island safely. “It’s only God’s protection that we survived,” reflected Tieni to Mr. Vahefonua Tupola of *Radio Tonga News Magazine* program. She explained how she and other passengers, including women and young children, had left for the island, unaware of the threats from a looming tsunami triggered by the volcanic eruption from the newly formed islands of Hunga Tonga and Hunga Ha’apai.

“We set sail after the cancellation of the tsunami warning early on Saturday morning, (15th of January). We had a lot of people on board and cargoes as we were to prepare a feast to farewell our Free Church of Tonga’s students tomorrow, (Sunday).

Tieni plays a leading role in the church’s youth group. She explained that at first, they did not see any unusual sign of a looming disaster. They only noticed something was about to happen when they were about to enter the shores of ‘Atatā. They had five young children on board, 4-5 men and the rest of the passengers were female youth. They had many passengers and foodstuff together with ice-block to preserve their food for Sunday.

As they approached the island, Tieni gradually noticed the sudden change of tide, something abnormal that the sea water looks boiling. It was then she realized that there may be a tsunami happening soon. Not long, the waves started building up in height and strength from one end of the island. “This was not normal,” according to Tieni based on her many years of traveling at sea. Suddenly, they heard the first explosion from the volcano and the next one which was very scary. She then remembered her family in New Zealand and fortunately international communication was still working. She called her family just to let them know that there may be a tsunami washing onto the island. After her call, the skipper called out to throw some of the cargoes overboard. They off-loaded some of the ice-block bags to lighten the boat. They found a benzene bottle and shared with one of the boats consisting of male youth who went fishing for their Sunday feast. According to Tieni, the youth, while fishing, felt that the sea was “electrified” and they quickly boarded their boat.

The volcanic eruption has severed Tonga’s seabed fiber optic cable cutting off all internet and telephone connections with the rest of the world. The photo (*right*) shows the spot of the severed fiber optic cable. (PC: Supplied)

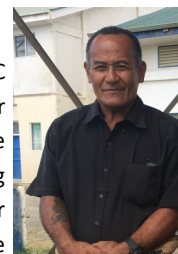


(PC: GoT, Supplied)

“The captain relied on me and another cousin to throw some of the cargoes to the sea. None of the other passengers were able to help as they felt paralyzed from fear. The ensuing eruption was so loud that we felt the sky was about to part and the land breaking up. The captain was able to call out to turn the boat around to dodge the tsunami waves coming from every direction. Finally, he managed to put the boat engine to its highest capacity that drove the board right to the shore. We quickly tried to help each other and run to higher ground. That’s when we began to realize that the island has been bashed by the tsunami waves with broken houses, trees and water tanks swept to the sea,” Tieni explained. She and all the passengers of the two boats were safe on land and very thankful to God for His protection.

“Zion in Mango island” - Rev. Kisina Toetu’u of FWC of Mango, Mu’omu’a, Ha’apai

Meanwhile, Rev. Kisina Toetu’u (*right*) of the FWC of Mango spoke of God’s timing when the disaster struck. He was very thankful that it was day time when the eruption and tsunami took place giving ample time for the people to run for higher ground. Despite being saddened by the loss of the Chief Steward of his church, he thanked God for everything.



“We thanked God for saving our lives,” Rev. Toetu’u said. The men used a few mats that they managed to take with them to shelter the children and women from the volcanic dust while on Mount Saione (Zion) at Mango.

“We sat on the ground holding the mats throughout the night. We sang hymns and shared encouraging words knowing that our God keeps us safe.”

On the following morning, Sunday, they found the body of the chief steward and immediately carried out the burial ritual.

According to Rev. Toetu’u, being encouraged and strengthened through their strong faith in God let them to rise beyond the damage and chaotic nature of the island and “children were playful amidst the rubble.” He said discussion with the islanders led to their wish to leave their island and resettle on Tongatapu. They were evacuated to Nuku’alofa and are being housed at the hall of the FWC of Longolongo. @OMBTonga. (PC: TV Tonga)



One of the vaccination centers at the hall of the Basilica of St. Anthony of Padua for the people of Kolofo'ou.

Tongatapu and Vava'u under lockdown amid spread of COVID-19 cases

Tonga's main island, Tongatapu, and the second island of Vava'u, remain in total lockdown for two (2) weeks as the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases continue to rise since the past few days. The lockdown is to counter further spread of the confirmed Omicron variant. Of the 65 cases, to date, only one person has just been confirmed in Vava'u.

The Prime Minister, Hon. Siaosi Sovaleni, revealed this increase to the nation on Thursday, 10th February, 2022. It was also confirmed that tests of five specimens sent to Australia were the Omicron variant of COVID-19.

One of the confirmed cases has been tested negative earlier this week, so the number of positive active cases stands at 64, according to the Hon. Minister of Health, Dr. Saia Piukala. This has been an increase from 34 from the previous day, Wednesday.

Most of the cases were confirmed from the same clusters in the villages of Vaini, Pili and Sopu. New cases were also recorded in Kolomotu'a, Sopu and Mataika in Tongatapu. They all belong to the same clusters of initial cases. A family of 13 members were all confirmed as positive. The 65 confirmed cases have all taken their second dose of the vaccination.

Dr. Piukala has urged people that "it is better to rest at home than to rest in peace." He was appealing to people to remain at home in order to contain the spread of the virus. He said that the main problem is the reluctance of people to disclose honest information on places and time they have visited. This information is important in contact tracing and curbing further increases.

To date, 98% have taken their first dose of the vaccine while 89% with their second dose. Fifteen percent has taken their booster shots. About 75% of the population or 76,000 people are eligible to be immunized against COVID-19 in Tonga. Tonga has been COVID-free since its global outbreak two years ago. @OMBTonga.



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