



PRESS RELEASE

New digital access to information and public reporting through Ombudsman Tonga

Nuku 'alofa, Tonga – Citizens of the Kingdom of Tonga are now benefitting from a new digital solution for more efficient public access to information and public reporting through the renewed website of the Office of the Ombudsman. A new digital function, the online complaint system that has been added to the website enables citizens to lodge complaints online regarding any government services that fall within the jurisdiction of the Tongan Ombudsman's Office. The digital advancement for the enhanced citizens' right to information and transparent public mechanisms in Tonga is supported through the UN Pacific Regional Anti-Corruption Project (UN-PRAC) funded by New Zealand Government and implemented by the UN Development Programme (UNDP).

The complaints lodgment through the Ombudsman's Office used to be made only through a printed hard copy of the form that needs to be submitted to the Office in person or by mail. The new digital system, which makes it easier for the public to make complaints online, also allows for better recording and analysis of complaints lodged and official responses, and improved public reporting of the Tonga Ombudsman Office.

The right to information is the legal right of individuals to access official information as a critical tool to improve government transparency and accountability and reduce corruption. The Right to Information is central to the foundational human right to freedom of expression, as recognized in [the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#), and [the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#). The Right to Information is also specifically referred to in [the UN Convention against Corruption](#), the only legally binding multilateral international anti-corruption treaty, to which Tonga is a party since February 2020 among other 188 state parties (as of 18 November 2021).

New Zealand's High Commissioner to Tonga, His Excellency Matthew Howell, commended the advancement in the digitalisation of the public access to information and reporting, and said, "The Tonga Ombudsman's work will further promote good governance and sustainable development for the people of Tonga. Through improved access to information, it will also help enable efficient trade, business, investment, disaster preparedness and recovery. which Aotearoa New Zealand aims to support through the UNDP project."

Technically upgraded with user-centred design, the website also provides higher accessibility: complying with Tonga's official Disability Policy; designed for low-bandwidth users; with cutting-edge World Wide Web (WWW) standards; secure; and allow for machine language translation (the primary language is English).

UNDP Pacific Office in Fiji Deputy Resident Representative and Officer-in-Charge, Ms Yemesrach Workie emphasized that the right to information is also a key element of [the 2030 Agenda](#), and critical to developing transparent, efficient and accountable government institutions that deliver equitable and sustainable economic growth.

“Citizens’ engagement in holding governments to account through enhanced Right to Information and public reporting is crucial for better policies for society, the economy, and the environment, and so help ensure that no one is left behind. It is part of UNDP’s continuous efforts to play especially in relation to addressing corruption across the Pacific,” added Ms Workie.

More information about the Office of the Ombudsman Tonga and the online complaints lodgement is accessible on <https://ombudsman.to/>. The technical services for the website upgrade were provided by Solutions Studio Fiji.

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