



## PRESS RELEASE

### Exercise Longreach to Strengthen Tonga's Emergency Response Capacity



**10 October 2023 (Nuku'alofa, Tonga)** – More than seventy participants are engaged in Exercise Longreach 2023 this week, an ongoing collaboration between the Australian Defence Force (ADF), the National Disaster Risk Management Office (formerly NEMO), His Majesty's Armed Forces, and all first responder agencies in Tonga. This intensive training is taking place from October 10 to 12 at the Fa'onelua Convention Centre, Nuku'alofa, Tonga, and has been designed to enhance inter-operability and preparedness between the above agencies.

In opening the event, Mr. Sione 'Akauola, CEO for MEIDECC, Tonga reminded participants that Exercise Longreach offers an opportunity to improve knowledge on disaster risk management processes and refine the coordination approaches necessary to respond effectively and efficiently to future disasters. He urged participants to embrace a culture of continuous learning and be prepared for the known and unknown challenges, particularly in light of the upcoming cyclone season and the recent declaration of an El Niño alert.

Echoing a similar call to action, Lord Vaea, Minister for Internal Affairs and Acting Minister Responsible for His Majesty's Armed Forces; Tonga Police and Tonga Fire and Emergency Services in his welcome remarks emphasised the need to strengthen shared relationships, adopt better communication strategies, and improve approaches to mobilise timely disaster relief to the most vulnerable. Lord Vaea stated "We must tailor our systems and approaches to address the context specific challenges we encounter on a day-to-day basis. We must do more than just admire or endure changes in risk environments because our security, our prosperity, our social systems, and our ability to respond effectively depends considerably on the approaches and technologies that complement the roles each one of us share. As agents of change, we must be confident with the approaches we are promoting to building resilient communities."

On behalf of her Australian Counterparts, Australia's High Commissioner to Tonga, Her Excellency, Ms. Rachael Moore reflected on the recent experiences from the triple-pronged disaster, the volcanic eruption, tsunami, and COVID-19 and underscored how coordination and communication are

essential ingredients when it comes to disaster response. She mentioned "Exercise Longreach is an opportunity to ensure all the systems are in place for Tonga to lead its people through the next disaster response, whenever it may strike".

During the three-day training, sessions will be targeted to enhance the operationality of the new DRM Act and Policy, with the view of strengthening existing governance arrangements to support coordination and response efforts. Delivering the vote of thanks, the Chief Superintendent of the Tonga Police, Mr. 'Atunaisa Taumoepeau expressed his thanks to all the partners for making this training possible and underscored the importance of sharing the commitment to building a resilient Tonga. In reflecting, he mentioned "the welfare and safety of Tongan communities is all our responsibility and dedication and commitment to them can be fulfilled through collaboration".

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For more information, or media interviews please contact:

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