



## PRESS RELEASE

### **Tonga to Conduct Tsunami Evacuation Drill for 'Apifo'ou College and 'Ahopanilolo Technical Institute**

Nuku'alofa (20 October 2023) – Tsunamis are natural disasters that can strike with little to no warning, posing a significant threat to coastal populations. The recent event of the Honga-Tonga-Honga-Hapai (HTHH) volcanic eruption and tsunami in January 2022 underscored the importance of preparedness, education, and practice. The key takeaway from this incident has been the need for community involvement, regular exercises, and effective communication to save lives and foster resilience.

On October 20, 2023, the National Disaster Risk Management Office (NDRMO), in collaboration with the Tonga Meteorological Services (TMS) and Tonga Geological Services (TGS), is jointly organizing a tsunami preparedness drill at 'Apifo'ou College' and 'Ahopanilolo Technical Institute'. The primary objective of this initiative is to bolster the readiness of coastal communities, with a particular emphasis on safeguarding Catholic Schools located in proximity to the shorelines. Moreover, to assess the readiness of key institutions, including the National Emergency Coordination Centre (NECC), Tonga National Tsunami Warning Centre (TNWC), and Tonga Geological Service (TGS) in preparedness for any future event. This initiative aligns with the theme of "fighting inequality for a resilient future" as promoted by the International Day of Disaster Risk Reduction and World Tsunami Awareness Day.

Mafua-'i-Vai'utukakau Maka, Director of the National Disaster Risk Management Office, expressed the significance of this undertaking: "Tonga is particularly vulnerable to disasters, and this drill underscores our ongoing commitment to protecting and educating our citizens about disaster preparedness and response. Through the active involvement of various stakeholders, including government ministries, first responders, educational institutions, families, businesses, and local organizations, our mission is to save lives and reassure concerned parents."

The exercise will convey essential safety instructions, clarifying the need for residents in safe areas to stay and providing guidelines for evacuees' safe return. This exercise prioritizes on-foot evacuation, drawing lessons from past tsunami experiences to enhance mobility and reduce traffic congestion and blocked escape routes.

The tsunami evacuation drill will commence with the unveiling of Tsunami Evacuation Sign Boards in the Greater Nuku'alofa area, for public awareness and to educate about evacuation routes, highlighting the significance of clear communication and planning. The Prime Minister and Acting Minister for the Ministry of MEIDECC will hand over the Emergency Management Plan for 'Ahopanilolo Technical Institute' and 'Apifo'ou College.

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