



17th April 2020

To: Secretariat of United Nations
Secretary-General
High Level Panel
Room S-142, Palais des Nations
CH-1211 Geneva 10
idpspanel@un.org

Re: - Call for Submissions and Input

Dear HLP – ID Secretariat,

The Secretary-General is seeking your views on the expected
outcome for Tonga and small island developing States (SIDS) in the face of
disasters that are increasingly linked to climate change. The Kingdom of Tonga is composed of 173
islands that are all uniquely vulnerable to tropical cyclones, earthquakes, ENSO, and sea level rise.

Last week, our capital Nuku'alofa was devastated as Cyclone Harold, a category 4 storm, made landfall
during an unseasonably high King Tide. The resulting storm surge sent a wall of water up to 2.7m high,
barreling across low-lying, coastal communities on Tongatapu and Eua. On Tongatapu, damage was
concentrated in the capital's low-lying districts and on the western coast where the island's major
resorts were decimated.

It is expected that the number of people displaced by disasters in SIDS
communities will continue to increase as sea levels rise and tropical storms
recommence. Recommendations have been compiled in partnership with John Marazita, an expert on disaster
displacement in small island states. Please find the attached document and provide your
recommendations that will undoubtedly be of great value to the Secretary-General.

Sincerely,

H. E. [Name]
High Commissioner



Input for the High-Level Panel of Experts on Disaster Preparedness and Resilience of the Kingdom of Tonga

Background. The Kingdom of Tonga, a small island state in the South Pacific, has been hit by tropical cyclones, earthquakes and tsunamis. In 1960, Tonga was struck by 76 tropical cyclones. Widespread destruction caused by category-5 Cyclone Ianaru in the main island group led to displacement locally. The following input presented to the UN Secretary General's High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement discusses lessons learned from past disasters in the context of ongoing international dialogue.

Key Points

- ✓ **Priority needs to recognize that King Tides are natural disasters that cause disaster displacement...**

Sea level rise is often associated with disaster, yet natural disaster. Coastal communities around the world, however, are increasingly impacted by abnormally high tides that the Pacific region refers to as King Tides. Depending on lunar and solar orbits, coastal communities can experience up to 4 King Tides per year. Increasingly, even minor weather disturbances coinciding with King Tides lead to flooding.

The phenomenon is not limited to the Pacific Islands. Last year, displacement has been seen in the Bahamas and South Florida (Doria). In Tuvalu (Tutuila) and Tonga (Nukunono), we also saw records attributed to a King Tide. Disaster and preparedness literature ignores the link between King Tides and displacement and are thus not monitored. This included... now causing... avoidable displacement that needs to be monitored.

- ✓ **Safeguards for IDPs tracking document...**

In small island states, displacement often necessitates movement between islands for indefinite lengths of time. IDPs finding to register for benefits or apply for temporary work/housing documentation to verify identification or credentials. IDPs lacking documentation may be denied benefits or unable to secure employment. For foreign nationals displaced by disaster, the lack of documentation can have far reaching consequences including... benefits and in cases deportation.³ Measures to protect IDPs without access to proper documentation are inadequate.

- ✓ **Inclusion of indigenous knowledge in DRR frameworks**

¹ Marazita, J. "Silent Disasters: Preparing for the King Tide". March 2020.

² ... L. "Italy Declares State of Emergency in Venice Due to King Tide Flooding". 15 November 2019.

³ IOM. "IOM Tracks Reports of Foreign National Migrants from The Bahamas". 15 November 2019.

Disaster displacement has been a part of the Pacific Islands' narrative since our ancestors first arrived here. Our local communities have fostered innovative methods to prepare, sustain, and recover from natural disasters. The indigenous knowledge around disaster displacement has the potential to improve the flow of IDPs into durable solutions. The governments, however, do not have the resources or methodology to cultivate and disseminate this knowledge. Our governments must not repeat past mistakes and gain a broader understanding of indigenous knowledge by policymakers and researchers should be encouraged and facilitated.

- ✓ Streamlined funding for large-scale local and regional environmental adaptation initiatives.

Regional cooperation between states on DRR and disaster preparedness programs such as the Commonwealth Blue Charter and the Pacific Resilience and Recovery Fund. Regional and local solutions to DRR and disaster preparedness programs are essential. However, local/state-initiated large-scale projects face myriad funding barriers. Recent projects, such as the procurement of reformer's bag slitting machine by the Department of Urban Planning lack sufficient funding avenues. As such, Tonga is left dependent on international funding for such projects. Funding mechanisms for such projects would allow greater agency for small island states and bring innovation to the intergovernmental and development aid projects.

Displacement

Displacement is a complex phenomenon. As natural disasters that often cause local and international displacement, the levels associated with climate change have led to a vulnerability to King Tide. As tropical cyclones intensify, coastal communities face surges such as tsunami-like walls of seawater several meters high across low-lying islands. The resulting displacement of people and property is often reported in local media. However, their predictable occurrences are not monitored. Most importantly, coastal communities are left without guidance and assistance is often exasperated.

Island states experience unique displacement pathways that have often overlooked. As islands are increasingly impacted by disaster, survivors often persevere to other islands. Unlike localized displacement, displaced persons often lack sufficient documentation in the new setting and without a supportive personal network, they be unable to register for documents. Persons without legal status are acutely vulnerable.

The Kingdom of Tonga governs 172 geographically diverse islands that were settled by Polynesian seafarers at a time when Europe entered the Iron Age. Over 3 millennia, our ancestors adapted to the risk of natural disaster. They managed displacement and negotiated durable solutions. Although indigenous knowledge may not be enough to overcome the projected impacts of climate change, our rapid response states do not repeat our mistakes. As sea level rises and tropical storms strengthen, small island states are the warri

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