

For immediate release

October 2, 2009

CHURCH MARSHALLS RESOURCES TO ASSIST IN PACIFIC CRISIS

- By Lynn McMurray, Mission President, Nuku'alofa Tonga Mission

Following the devastating earthquake and resulting tsunami in the central Pacific, *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* is marshalling its resources to help local communities address the crisis.

Tongan island benefits from assistance from nearby Mormons

In Tonga, a massive three-wave tsunami crushed the northern little island of Niuatoputapu, destroying most of the homes in its three villages and leaving roughly 90% of its 1,019 people without shelter and clothing. The terrifying waves, reported by survivors to have reached the bows of the coconut trees, obliterated the island's hospital, bank, government offices, telecommunication facilities, jail, and airport buildings. Nine people died and four were critically injured, all not of our faith.

According to Niua District President Tevita Lino, no member of the Church in Niuatoputapu was killed or injured, though about ten Latter-day Saint families lost their homes and essentially everything they own.

Upon hearing of the tragedy, Church members on Tonga's main island of Tongatapu rallied to provide relief for the suffering people of Niuatoputapu, members and non-members alike. On Thursday, following an emergency planning meeting, Tongatapu's twelve stake presidents broadcast a message on local Tonga radio inviting the Saints to donate food, clothing, cooking equipment, pillows, blankets and other necessities for the people of Niuatoputapu.

They were invited to drop their donations at their stake centers, where full-time missionaries helped load them into trucks. At first light Friday, dozens of trucks began transporting the goods to government warehouses. From here, military trucks transported them to the nearby wharf, where they were loaded into a French ship, which will carry them to Niuatoputapu. Government leaders expressed sincere gratitude for what they described as an outpouring of love, along with astonishment at how much was gathered in just a matter of hours. The goods will arrive in Niuatoputapu early next week, where they will be distributed to any in need.

Two missionary sisters are "angels of mercy"

Among the many stories of faith, courage and love that are slowly coming to light, that of Sisters Siale Totau and Fortunata Tohi, the two Latter-day Saint missionary sisters living on Niuatoputapu at the time of the disaster, is one of small miracles and tender mercies.

Having received a very late warning of the impending tsunami, the sisters, along with many others, hurried to higher ground to avoid the deluge. From this vantage point, they watched as the waves destroyed the village below. After the waves receded and they were sure of their safety, they returned down into the desolation below to help wherever they could.

MORE...

**FOR MORE INFORMATION: ALAN WAKELEY +61-405-103-407 or +61-2-9872-4333
PHILIP HAGUE +64-21-206-6621 or +64-7-847-1197**

Style guide note: When reporting about The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, please use the complete name of the Church in the first reference. For a subsequent reference, the full name or the contractions "The Church of Jesus Christ" or "the Church" are appropriate. For more information on the use of the name of the Church, go to www.media.lds.org under Quick Facts and FAQ's, Style Guide.

The little LDS chapel in the village of Hihifo, situated just beyond the reach of the waves, had been spared, along with the little missionary house next to it. These were quickly converted into a makeshift hospital and refuge for the homeless and injured.

One couple, Paea and 'Ofa Kuma, who are of another faith, described in some detail the tireless efforts of these sisters as they helped the local people. Paea had tried to flee from the wave in a vehicle, but could not escape. He jumped out of his car only moments before it hit, only to have the wave roll the car on top of him, crushing and pinning him to the ground under its weight. The second wave knocked it off, but he was seriously injured, and only survived the third wave by clinging to the sturdy leaves of nearby plants, by which he was able to pull himself up and save his life.

'Ofa frantically searched for him, and finding him, helped him to the little chapel where the sisters were aiding everyone. They expressed how touched they were as they saw these sisters assisting with the dead, caring for the wounded, assisting the nurses, cooking food, running errands for those in need, and comforting the sad and discouraged. "They were weary from cooking, and brought great comfort," 'Ofa Kuma stated. "The help they rendered was not small, it was truly great."

Samoa relief

Latter-day Saint authorities in Samoa, New Zealand and the United States have continued to devote substantial energies to organizing humanitarian relief for the battered islands of Upolu and Tutuila, otherwise known as Samoa and American Samoa. Both of these islands bore the brunt of the Pacific tsunami, resulting from the underground earthquake that shook the region, leaving thousands homeless and with little raiment or food. The other Samoa island of Savaii was not as disturbed by the tsunami.

Latter-day Saints throughout the unaffected areas on the northern side of Upolu have been gathering supplies and are continually shipping these to communities on the southern side of the island where the devastation was total.

After detailed consultations with government authorities, the Church is presently preparing multiple container loads of food, medical supplies, linen, wheelchairs and crutches to ship from its warehouses in the United States to supplement the large-scale contributions of government authorities in Samoa. Shelter, in the form of tarpaulin tents, is being supplied by the Australian and New Zealand governments to house the thousands whose homes were destroyed. These governments are also assisting with clean water supplies.

The great majority of the Latter-day Saint aid will be distributed via government agencies and the Red Cross. The Church's Pacific Area Presidency has emphasized to local Latter-day Saint relief authorities the Church policy that aid is to be shared amongst all people in need irrespective of their religious affiliation. The Presidency said all are God's children, are loved by him and in need of care.

In American Samoa, aid supplies largely are being provided by the central government. These authorities have asked Latter-day Saints leaders if they may use Church buildings to house those who have lost their homes. The Church has responded willingly to this request.

ENDS