

Tongan island is "over 90 percent" destroyed

Source: Solomon Islands People First Network (PFnet)

Date: 02 Oct 2009

Relief workers have reached the remote Nuiatoputapu Island in the north of Tonga and are reporting that most of the buildings have been washed away.

Nine people died in Tonga after three big waves moved about 600 metres inland.

Alfred Soakai from Tonga's National Disaster office says about 1300 to 1600 people live on Nuiatoputapu Island and locals are now experiencing some relief.

"There's a lot of scared people there at the moment but they are slowly being counselled by the staff that went up on the patrol boat."

Alfred Soakai says people have enough food, shelter and medicine but they must now look on to the second stage of providing assistance.

He says the hospital is completely destroyed, and the island has lost a lot of infrastructure.

"If you could pass your mind back to the tsunami in 2004, there're similar images of flattening villages. In one village of Hihifa we have over 90 percent of the buildings damaged, trees upturned, and we could still see seawater over the low lying areas of the island."

The tourism office on Tonga's Ha'apai island group says two waves struck the group's main island Lifuka, which displaced several families.

The office's head, Nonu Pohiva, says the waves damaged a few houses on Lifuka's low lying areas.

"There're a few families affected on Ha'apai. There were about two waves coming on shore and there were a few families who were staying very close to the beach whose houses were damaged, but luckily there were no casualties."

Nonu Pohiva says the families are mainly being looked after by relatives.

The 8-point zero quake occurred at the north end of a large active tectonic plate boundary, close to the 10 kilometre-deep Tonga-Kermadec Trench.