

Samoa/Tonga: NZDF begins tsunami draw down

Source: Government of New Zealand

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Having successfully achieved its immediate disaster relief tasks in the wake of the tsunami that struck Samoa and Tonga on the 29th September 2009 the New Zealand Defence Force has commenced a draw-down of personnel and equipment no longer required.

HMNZS CANTERBURY has started loading the Iroquois helicopter, vehicles and plant, and will sail from Apia on Wednesday 21 October. The departure of NZDF personnel does not signal the end of New Zealand's assistance to Samoa. The NZ\$6.1 million dollar contribution to a combined trans-Tasman package, announced by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Murray McCully last week, will provide the Government of Samoa with the ability to rebuild its infrastructure, restore essential services and begin the process of economic recovery.

In Tonga, New Zealand has pledged \$1.5 million dollars to help the northern island of Niuaotupapu rebuild.

"We will continue the aid effort in Tonga over the coming days on Niuaotupapu, an island with significant tsunami damage, before returning to New Zealand," said Wing Commander Karl Harvey, an NZDF Senior National Officer.

"The effects of this tsunami have been felt across the South Pacific and it has had a significant impact on the people of Samoa and Tonga directly, something the NZDF personnel here have seen every day. The tragic loss of life cannot be reversed, but we hope that with our contribution to the combined aid effort, the people of Samoa and Tonga can start down the road to recovery and rebuild their respective communities and countries."

Over 150 personnel from the Navy, Army and Air Force have participated in a whole-of-Government approach to assist the Governments of Samoa and Tonga by working with NZAID, the Ministry of Civil Defence and Emergency Management, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, NZ Police, the Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, NZ Customs, The Ministry of Civil Defence and Emergency Management, NGOs and the Australian Defence Force. Ends

Contact: Captain Zac Prendergast 021 806 926

Background:

A Royal New Zealand Air Force (RNZAF) P3 Orion aircraft from No. 5 Squadron was the first to arrive on the day of the tsunami and conducted

three days of disaster reconnaissance and aerial searches of the Samoan and Tongan coastline.

Strategic airlift was provided by No 40 Squadron RNZAF using C130 Hercules and Boeing 757 aircraft flying seven flights from NZ. They delivered 12,000kg of medical equipment and supplies and 22,000kgs of general aid including tents, caskets, chainsaws, tooling, shelter boxes, tarps, food, water etc. The aid was provided from a number of sources including NZAID ,various NGOs and others. The Boeing 757 was also used to return eleven New Zealanders injured by the Tsunami back to NZ. In a joint Royal Australia Air Force (RAAF) and RNZAF operation, an RAAF C130 Hercules flew two flights from NZ delivering RNZAF helicopters and other aid.

Two Iroquois helicopters from No 3 Squadron RNZAF provided tactical airlift and flew 76 hours in support of tasks for the Samoan Government, NZ Government agencies, NZ Police and other aid agencies. Most of the tasks were aid distribution from Faleata to villages in both Upolu and Savaii. Air Force personnel also assisted in the clean up of Manono Island and the repair and refloating of a local fishing vessel.

The Royal New Zealand Navy (RNZN) Dive Team repaired and replaced fresh water pipelines between Manono and Namua Islands off the coast of Upolu. They conducted sub-surface body searches of the southern lagoons including detailed searches of high probability areas within the lagoon. In addition they conducted damage inspections of Aleipata Wharf, environmental reef surveys and sub-surface obstacle removal operations.

HMNZS CANTERBURY delivered aid, including 80 tonnes of general aid, 6 tonnes medical equipment and medical supplies, 7 tonnes of plumbing supplies, 128 tonnes of power poles and Fale poles and 4 tonnes of electrical supplies.

The NZ Army Medical team provided medical assistance at Lalomanu Hospital and Poutasi Medical Clinics. NZDF Aero-Medical Evacuation (AME) teams provided in-flight medical coverage to injured New Zealanders being repatriated to NZ in addition to a local AME flight in country. The NZ Army Engineers provided reconnaissance and survey assessments of damaged infrastructure, assisted in ground body searches with the NZ Police and other Rescue services. They worked with the Samoan Water Authority constructing temporary toilets and water tanks shelters for the displaced in the Saleapaga, Sale'a'amua and Satetoea villages.

NZDF Environmental Health Officers worked with Samoan and Tongan Ministry of Health and other environmental health agencies to establish the needs of displaced people as a result of the tsunami.