

Interview: Samoa PM calls for more int'l fund for reconstruction

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APIA, Samoa, Oct 06, 2009 (Xinhua via COMTEX) -- Samoa's Prime Minister Tuilaepa Lufesoliai Sailele Malielegaoi said the most difficult job the country faces is reconstruction of the damaged houses in the tsunami and he called for more fund from the international community.

As of Monday (local time), the official death toll from the devastating tsunami on Sept. 29 has reached 142 and seven others are still missing. The disaster also caused massive damage to houses.

"The cost (for reconstruction) will be millions and millions of dollars," Tuilaepa told Xinhua in an exclusive interview at the Prime Minister's Office on Monday.

The south-eastern and southern coastal areas of Samoa's Upulo Island were mostly hit by the tsunami, where some villages and beach resorts were destroyed. The loss caused by the tsunami was estimated at 100 million U.S. dollars.

The government encourages the villagers to build new house in higher ground inland, Tuilaepa said.

Tuilaepa said with the help of the international community, the relief work is progressing and the damaged water pipes are being restored in some stricken areas.

"It would possibly take about six months to restore electricity supplies, telecommunication network and transportation," he added.

Tourism is the pillar industry of the South Pacific island country, with a population of 180,000. The tourism revenue accounts for a quarter of the country's GDP.

The prime minister said only a small number of the country's tourism facilities were destroyed. He said foreign tourists are welcome to take vacations in Samoa.

Tuilaepa said the Chinese leaders have conveyed condolences to the victims in Samoa and pledged assistance to disaster relief work. He said the Samoa government and people appreciate that.

Samoa government officials said China has pledged 100,000 U.S. dollars for direct emergency relief work and another 30,000 U.S. dollars toward China Red Cross relief in Samoa. China also pledged relief materials worth 2 million yuan (about 292,941 U.S. dollars).

Tuilaepa also said the country's people will have half a day off on Thursday for the memorial service for the victims at 3 p.m. (local time).