

WHS ROUNDTABLE ON NATURAL DISASTERS AND CLIMATE CHANGE NEW ZEALAND STATEMENT

As co-chair of the WHS Pacific Consultations I want to focus on two key themes identified in Auckland and ones that I think need to be reflected in the outcomes from this Summit. The first is the need for fast and effective responses to disasters that support ***national-led efforts***. The second is the urgent and important need for ***practical development actions that build economic and community resilience***.

We are all aware of the challenges that natural disasters and climate change create for Pacific countries and other Small Island Developing States. The impacts of the recent El Nino weather pattern and the Pacific Cyclone Season are clear.

In March this year, Fiji was hit by the biggest storm in its recorded history, killing 44 people and displacing tens of thousands.¹ In 2014 – Cyclone Pam devastated Vanuatu causing USD450m in damage – over half of the country's GDP. Over the same two years, many parts of the Pacific experienced severe droughts and food shortages as a result of the El Nino season that significantly undermine human and economic development. While we hope that these are 'exceptional' years, we must brace ourselves for this to be the new normal.

These impacts mean that hard won economic growth and development gains have been wiped out. Even with these challenges the Pacific is incredibly resilient, and New Zealand works with its Pacific partners to support this resilience, including when disaster events strike.

¹The TC Winston Post Disaster Needs Assessment in Fiji values total damage and loss at FJD\$2.8 billion (NZ\$1.93b), roughly one third of Fiji's annual GDP. Approximately 540,414 people have been affected (66% of Fiji's total population). ***NB: Figures provided in-confidence. Fiji intends to officially release the PDNA at the WHS (Fiji has a speaking slot at the Natural Disaster and Climate Change Roundtable).***

Responding to disasters

I want to share some of the lessons we have learnt from living in an increasingly vulnerable region to almost the full range of natural and seismic disasters.

Our emergency response capabilities must be fast, innovative and flexible to respond quickly when the need arises. It's challenging responding in a region like the Pacific with remote island groups spread over a vast ocean and dispersed populations. It needs a collective effort. Civilian and military capabilities need to work seamlessly together. Pre-positioning of supplies and capabilities make sense in order to respond quicker. The use of simple and innovative technologies to support information management and logistics are critical. We must get smarter in the way we respond to ensure it is appropriate and useful in the context in which we work.

A significant factor that ensures a successful response is empowering and respecting national Governments who must lead the response to natural disasters in their own countries. New Zealand responded to TC Winston in Fiji with over 500 civilian and military personnel, defence force assets and tonnes of supplies and equipment, but we did so in support of the Fiji Government and under the direction of the Fiji national disaster management system.

We want to reinforce that the international humanitarian system must be fit for purpose and must be flexible enough to change its approach for differing contexts. What works in Ethiopia may not work in Vanuatu and vice versa.

We also need to get better at supporting regional response efforts. Pacific countries have far better knowledge and understanding of their neighbours than their non-Pacific partners. It makes sense to find ways of fostering this. For example, New Zealand helped to transport Fiji engineers and medical personnel to respond in Vanuatu following cyclone Pam last year which was very effective.

Risk reduction and building economic resilience

While we must get better at responding in a context-appropriate way, the most useful and sensible investments that we can make are to reduce and mitigate risks of natural disasters and adapt to the impacts of climate change.

New Zealand is committed to doing just this. We focus on future proofing critical infrastructure and sharing our expertise and knowledge to help our Pacific and South East Asia partners to reduce risks and become more resilient.

We are also focused on improving economic resilience with our partners to safeguard the development gains that we make. For example, since 2013 New Zealand has committed over NZD120 million on low-carbon, clean energy solutions across the Pacific, reducing reliance on fossil fuels and improving resilience to climate change and natural hazards.

In Tokelau, all three atolls – previously wholly dependent upon fossil fuels for electricity – are now effectively 100 per cent renewable. The Northern Cook Islands became effectively 100 per cent renewable last year, as did all but one island in Tuvalu.

New Zealand is also working with Pacific governments and communities to protect and maximise natural resources, including through the sustainable management of fisheries – a critical resource for long term economic stability and resilience in the Pacific. This resource needs to be safeguarded for future generations. This is an area where New Zealand has extensive experience and, in addition to sharing our expertise, we have set aside NZD50 million to support the development of a more sustainable fisheries management system in the Pacific.

In conclusion, as we continue to discuss these serious issues and challenges, I encourage all parties to:

- Develop emergency response capabilities that are differentiated for natural disasters and for non-natural disasters such as protracted

emergencies. These need to be innovative, flexible and fit for purpose and we need to be courageous to test the traditional approaches.

- Wherever possible, support nationally led disaster responses. We must guard against setting up parallel approaches, overwhelming or undermining national Governments in disaster response. They must be empowered to lead their own efforts with international partners playing a respectful and supporting role.
- Recognise that one of the best things we can do is to invest in resilient economic infrastructure and income-generating initiatives. Strong economies are resilient economies and that is what we collectively strive to achieve.

Thank you.