



**PERMANENT MISSION  
OF THE KINGDOM OF TONGA TO THE  
UNITED NATIONS**

**Statement by Ms. Jeanett Vea, Permanent Mission of the Kingdom of Tonga to  
the United Nations.**

**Delivered at the 6<sup>th</sup> Committee – 76<sup>th</sup> session of the United Nations General  
Assembly**

**Agenda Item 87: Protection of persons in the event of disasters**

In person meeting held in the combined Conference Rooms 1, 2, & 3 at the United Nations  
Headquarters, New York on Monday, 18<sup>th</sup> and Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> October 2021

*Check against delivery*

**250 EAST 51ST STREET, NEW YORK, NY 10022  
TEL: (917) 369- 1025 – FAX (917) 369- 1024  
EMAIL : tongaunmission@gmail.com**

**Thank you, Madam Chair,**

Our delegation appreciates the opportunity for us to take the floor and since this is Tonga's first time to address the Sixth Committee in this Session, we express our congratulations to Your Excellency and the Bureau on your election. We thank you and the secretariat for your efforts on the working arrangements made to resume our discussions on this critically important topic. We also appreciate the effort and determination of the preceding Bureau and those delegations who discussed this agenda item during the 75<sup>th</sup> Session of the Assembly, and who also, while in the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, successfully coordinated its further consideration in this 76<sup>th</sup> Session. Tonga aligns itself with the statement delivered by Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS).

**Madam Chair,**

Tonga, like most small island states, is extremely vulnerable to the adverse impacts of climate change and disaster risks. The Pacific region, in particular, faces a myriad of natural disaster risks, from storms to earthquakes to acute sea level rise. Thus, we welcome discussion of this important agenda item under your able leadership.

The World Risk Report has consistently considered Tonga among the world's most vulnerable countries and ranked Tonga at its 2021 report as the World's Third Most 'At Risk' country to all disasters in 2020. The majority of our population lives in low lying, urban centers on our main island, Tongatapu. Locations with higher population density tend to have higher levels of risk and experience more severe consequences when disaster strikes.

Given the size and low, coastal topography of Tonga, disasters have both an economic and human impact. Tropical cyclones, coastal erosion, flash flooding, earthquakes, and tsunamis can wipe out infrastructure, destroy homes, businesses, and agriculture, and eliminate tourism, devastating communities and livelihoods overnight.

We have undertaken initiatives to benefit our population. The Government of Tonga developed a Resettlement Policy Framework in 2017 with the aim of bringing vulnerable housing to a cyclone resistant standard and relocating Tongans where an in situ situation cannot be achieved.

In its Sixth Assessment Report, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) predicted the intensity and frequency of climate change-induced natural disasters will continue to grow. Correspondingly, the likelihood that countries experiencing large-scale disasters will require assistance from the international community to meet the needs of their affected populations will continue to increase.

**Madam Chair,**

With the prevalence and severity of natural disasters in our region and around the globe, Tonga welcomes the International Law Commission's progressive development of international law through draft articles on the protection of persons in the event of disasters. Such foresight will allow us to meet the needs of our affected population through the solidarity and support of the international community while maintaining national sovereignty. We also reaffirm our commitment to the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015–2030) and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly SDGs 13, 14, and their respective targets.

**Madam Chair,**

As a small island developing state, any natural disaster is a national disaster. We stress that any development in international law regarding the protection of persons in the event of disasters must be accompanied by comprehensive international assistance to SIDS to achieve the same. We urge developed countries to honor commitments to climate financing, resilience funding, and development assistance.

As necessary as global climate change mitigation is, slowing warming alone is not sufficient. Our local climate has already changed dramatically. Only through adaptation and measures

250 EAST 51ST STREET, NEW YORK, NY 10022  
TEL: (917) 369- 1025 – FAX (917) 369- 1024  
EMAIL : tongaunmission@gmail.com

to build resilience may we mitigate the ongoing and increasing risk of disasters. We, therefore, call on the international community to assist vulnerable states, like Tonga, before and after disaster strikes with measures to relieve affected persons and benefit impacted states.

**Madam Chair,**

To conclude, we anticipate a constructive dialogue to determine the appropriate way forward. We welcome shared best practices, with the hope of building our resilience to disaster risks, and the development of effective instruments to bring greater accord amongst key players and affected States.

**I thank you.**