Tonga

Global ETC Teleconference #3
Date: 28/01/2022 **Time:** 06:00 UTC

All information related to ETC operations can be found on the website:

https://www.etcluster.org/emergency/tonga-volcanic-eruptiontsunami

For more information or to be added or deleted from the mailing list please contact:

Pacific.ETC@wfp.org

Attendance

Chair	Caroline Teyssier	UAE
ADB	Sibesh Bhattacharya	Philippines
Amabassador of Tonga to UAE	Ambassador A'kau'ola	UAE
Asia Pacific Telecommunity	Pornchai Leelapornchai	Thailand
Cisco Crisis Response	Joseph Harrison	USA
Government of Luxembourg	Gilles Hoffmann	Luxembourg
	Luc Hastir	Luxembourg
	Sylvain Ogier	Luxembourg
Intelsat	Robert Suber	Australia
	Diego Sutachan	Australia
ITU	Ashish Narayan	Thailand
	Vanessa Gray	Geneva
French Embassy	Francois-Xavier Leger	Fiji
Japanese Embassy	Iwano Taisuke	Kiribati
NetHope	Dagbjartur Brynjarsson	Iceland
TSF	Sebastien Latouille	France
UNESCO	Jiuta Korovulavula	Fiji
UNHCR	Min Sun	Australia
UNICEF	Rajeshwar Prasad	Fiji
	Marta Castello Dabbas	Spain
UNOPS	Ffion Conlon	Thailand
USAID	Patrick Bowers	USA
WFP	Omar Namaoui	Algeria
	Salma Farouque	Australia
	Vineet Prasad	Fiji
	Philippe Martins	Fiji
	Patricia Facultad	Italy
	John Dovale	New Zealand

	Oscar Caleman	Thailand
	Ozdzan Hadziemin	UAE
	Aramais Alojants	UAE
	Jenny Lee	Italy
WHO	Hassene Sidatt	Philippines
WMO	Henry Taiki	Samoa
Other	Kirath Swamy	
	Takashi Oba	
	Clara Aseniero	

Agenda

1. Situation update
2. Global ETC update
3. Partner updates

Minutes

1. Situation update

- One of the largest eruptions of the Hunga-Tonga-Hunga-Ha-apai underwater volcano in the past 30 years occurred on 15 January 2022. The eruption generated tsunami waves rising up to 15 metres, which hit the west coasts of Tongatapu Islands, 'Eua, and Ha'apai Islands. The eruption caused significant damage to the fibre-optic undersea communications cable, disconnecting the primary means of communication from and within Tonga. Massive power outages until 16 January further impacted on national telecommunications services.

- Since then, the services of the two telecommunications providers in Tonga—Digicel and the Tonga Communications Corporation (TCC)—have been partially restored with voice, SMS and limited internet services available. Both providers have lifted the network block put in place when services were first restored and so have increased their capacity. Data connectivity provided by these operators is still impacted as no priorization has been given to network traffic, causing network overload.

- The Asian Development Bank (ADB) in the capital of Nuku'alofa, Tongatapu, has activated its back-up VSAT and are offering humanitarians on the ground access to that internet capacity to enable international communications.

- Up to 80 percent of the population live on Tongatapu, the main island in Tonga. However, severe communications gaps remain with the outer islands. The University of the South Pacific (USP) is operating VSATs to provide limited connectivity throughout the island groups of Ha'apai and Vava'u, which are situated 180 kilometres and 314 kilometres to the north-east of Tongatapu respectively (see the ETC Tonga dashboard here).

- A handful of government responders have satphones on the remote islands, which are being used to communicate with the main island of Tongatapu and coordinate assessment work with their National Emergency Management Office (NEMO) counterparts.

- The government is maintaining its 'contactless' measures in this response, meaning only equipment can be deployed and will be set up by national staff with remote assistance coordinated by the ETC. All equipment and items sent to Tonga must undergo a three-day warehouse quarantine.
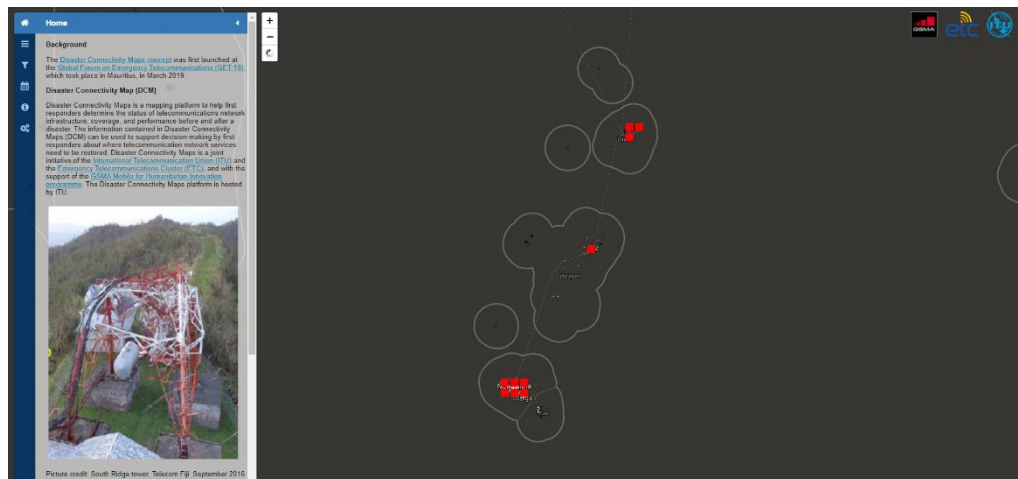
2. Global ETC update

- Amid significant logistical challenges, the ETC and partners have deployed or are preparing to deploy several shipments of communications solutions, via the landing stage in Brisbane, Australia, and with the assistance of the Logistics Cluster and WFP logistics unit. Airlifts from Brisbane to Tonga are being provided by the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF).

- Three Iridium satellite phones dispatched by WFP in Fiji have been received in Tonga, equipped with US$1,000 worth of credit each. The satphones are being held in the quarantine warehouse on Tongatapu for three days until they can be released on Sunday 30 January. The aim is for NEMO—national ETC lead in Tonga—to have the equipment in hand by Monday 31 January.

- Six additional satphones pre-paid by Iridium are being prepared for shipment from the International Telecommmunication Union (ITU) office in Geneva, Switzerland, to Tonga (via Brisbane), once the accompanying three SIMs have been received from Iridium. There has been a delay in sending the SIMs from FedEx. ITU is following up with FedEx on this issue.

- Three BGAN terminals pre-loaded with data provided by Télécoms Sans Frontières (TSF) are being held in the warehouse in Brisbane ready to airdrop into Tongatapu. The terminals were scheduled to arrive in Tonga today (28 January) but no confirmation has been received from the logistics unit of the delivery. The next possible delivery date is during the airdrop tomorrow (29 January).

  - One BGAN is committed to be deployed for use by staff in the UN Resident Coordinator's (RC) office in Nuku'alofa while the destination of the two remaining terminals as yet to be decided with NEMO, once received by them in country. NEMO staff are aware that the BGANs are not for use in high-capacity scenarios.

  - The ETC is planning to hold a remote teleconference with NEMO staff to operationalize the BGAN terminals, once they are received. TSF will share instructional materials on operationalizing the BGANs with the ETC, who will coordinate this activity with NEMO. TSF has also shared instructional materials on bandwidth management of the BGANs.

- In collaboration with USP, a pre-configured KU-band VSAT which has plug and play functionalities is being shipped to Tonga. There is an understanding with USP that the satellite equipment will be set up in the USP campus in Nuku'alofa to provide a common communications area for humanitarians on the ground to communicate internationally. The ETC will ensure global partners are informed of this service, once it is operational. USP personnel have technical capabilities and may be a key resource in operationalizing ETC equipment in the response.

- Through partnership with the Government of Luxembourg, the ETC is also preparing to deploy two C-band flyaway VSAT solutions from Dubai, UAE, to be airlifted to Tonga (via Brisbane). The WFP logistics unit is coordinating with focal points in Dubai to complete the necessary clearances to ensure these VSAT units can clear through the arrivals procedure in Australia as quickly as possible. There is a support component built into the Government of Luxembourg solution which will ensure this equipment can be operationalized by national staff on the ground.

- On 27 January, the ETC held a meeting with the government's Director of Communications in Tonga (who is also the national ETC lead in Tonga) as well as a chief telecommunications engineer from the Ministry of Communications. The main agenda item was to get clarity on specific communications needs in country as well as to plan for the locations where the incoming VSATs from the Government of Luxembourg may be deployed. Another meeting will be held with the Ministry to discuss this further, once the equipment has been received in Brisbane.

3. Partner updates

ITU

- **Disaster Connectivity Map (DCM)**: ITU continues to map the status of connectivity in Tonga. There has been no significant change observed over the past few days, with most connectivity detected on Tongatapu. However, red data points (indicating connectivity) were observed in Pangai in the Ha'apai group of islands, as well as in the Vava'u island group on 28 January.

- ITU and Intelsat continue their efforts to operationalize their connectivity equipment on the ground in Tonga, although the project is facing multiple technical issues. ITU will inform the ETC when the service is up and running.

Ambassador of Tonga to the U.A.E.

- Ambassaor 'Akau'ola expressed his thanks for the coordination efforts provided by the ETC in this response and highlighted the critical need for communications preparedness in the Pacific.

- On 27 January, during a high-level session on the Tonga disaster held in the UAE/online organized by the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and the Government of Tonga, the UAE government pledged US$2 million and its full support for the response in Tonga.

- In the same session, Yahsat (satellite company in the UAE) offered possible support of satellite equipment—such as satellite phones—to support the response.

The next teleconference meeting will be held on Wednesday 2 February 2022 at 06:00 UTC

06:00   UTC
07:00   Rome
10:00   Dubai
13:00   Bangkok
19:00   Nuku'alofa/Auckland

Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
DCM	Disaster Connectivity Map
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
ETC	Emergency Telecommunications Cluster
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
INGO	International Non Governmental Organization
ITU	International Telecommunication Union
NEMO	National Emergency Management Office
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
PHT	Pacific Humanitarian Team
TCC	Tonga Communications Corporation
TSF	Télécoms Sans Frontières
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
USP	University of the South Pacific
VSAT	Very Small Aperture Terminal
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization
WMO	World Meteorological Organization
WVI	World Vision International

Minutes: Elizabeth Millership, Global ETC Information Management & Communications Officer