

Draft 1

Seventy-eight World Health Assembly Kingdom of Tonga Intervention

Committee A- Pillar 2: One Billion more people enjoying better health and well being

Agenda Item 18- Review and update on matters considered by the Board

Agenda Item 18.3: Climate Change and Health (Document: A78/4 and Add.2 and EB156/2025/REC/1. Decision EB156 (40).

Thank you, Chairperson.

1. **The Kingdom of Tonga** notes the Report: **Climate Change and Health - Document: A78/4** and supports the recommendation by the Executive Board to draft a global Action Plan on Climate Change and Health:
2. The Government and people of Tonga greatly value the leadership and coordination that **WHO** provides for the Climate Change and Health agenda.
3. Tonga, like other Small Island Pacific States, faces distinct challenges that render it particularly vulnerable to the impact of climate change on health.
4. In 2022, the country faced three simultaneous emergencies: a volcanic eruption, a related tsunami and the first wave of COVID-19 community transmission.
5. In consultation and collaboration with a number of Government of Tonga ministries, the Ministry of Health works continuously to enhance the country's planning, and preparedness to respond to future emergencies.
6. The COP 26 Special Report on Climate Change highlighted the need for Resilient Infrastructure
7. **The WHO Western Pacific's Regional Director's** presentation on Climate Change and Health at the Pacific Islands Leader's Forum in Tonga in 2024 highlighted the need to address Climate Change and Health and specifically highlighted the need for resilient infrastructure, a well-trained workforce and the need to address NCDs, not just in normal times but also in emergencies.

8. A review of 76 hospitals in 14 Pacific nations found that 62% of them were within 500m of the sea or river putting them at risk of inundation and flooding.
9. Having resilient infrastructure is a must to protect our people, our equipment and our services, especially in times of emergencies and natural disasters.
10. In Tonga, with the support of ADB through one of their Climate Change Resilience projects, we were able to move our district hospital in Ha'apai from the sea-side where it was often subject to inundation to the highest point of the island. Ha'apai is the third largest Island Group in Tonga after Tongatapu and Vava'u.
11. With the support of the World Bank and Australian Aid, we are currently planning to build a new district hospital in Vava'u, the second largest island group in Tonga after Tongatapu.
12. Without adequate human resources, it is difficult to provide quality health services.
13. Human resource challenges including 'brain sharing' or 'brain drain' is a reality for most of our nations.
14. Many small island developing states don't meet the **WHO** recommended level of staff and many health professionals are leaving our shores for opportunities abroad.
15. For example, in 2023-2024, over 1,000 nurses have left from five countries namely Fiji, Kiribati, Tonga, Nauru and Tuvalu.
16. Hence, we need to concentrate our human resources for health efforts on retention measures and quality of training.
17. Tonga looks forward to continued support from **WHO** and development partners to address these Climate Change and health issues.

MALO 'AUPITO AND THANK YOU

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