On the way back from visiting Tongan troops serving in Afghanistan, the Prime Minister, Lord Tu'ivakano, recently held a special meeting with the Los Angeles Tongan community. The Prime Minister's visit to Los Angeles was in response to a special invitation from the Tongan Council of All Churches, South Bay Area.

Accompanying the Prime Minister were Representatives to the Legislative Assembly of Tonga, Lord Fakafanua, Mr Semisi Tapueluelu and the Commander of the Tonga Defence Services, Brigadier Tau'aika ‘Uta’atu.

The meeting was well attended by the Los Angeles Tongan community including the Chairperson of the Tongan Council of All Churches, Rev. Sione Veikoso, Stake President Sione Tuita Tu'i'asoa, Rev. Sione Nai, Pastor Paula Tulua, Rev. Viliami Vakalahi, Pastor Sione Manu and Bishop Ika. Music was provided by the Lennox Tongan United Methodist Church Brass Band led by Haniteli Vailea and the Tongan Seventh Day Adventist Choir.

The Tongan Council of All Churches in the South Bay area of Los Angeles comprises of 16 churches from different denominations including the Tongan United Methodist Church, Assembly of God, Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga in America, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter- Day Saints, Tonga Hou'eiki Church, Seventh-Day Adventist Church, Roman Catholic Church and the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga.
Prime Minister meets with Los Angeles Tongan Community

The Prime Minister was welcomed by the Chairperson of the combined churches, Rev Sione Veikoso who noted the significance of the second prime minister to visit the Los Angeles Tongan community. Stake President Tu'ita Tu'i’asoa followed by outlining the issues facing the Tongan community. He emphasised the importance that the churches play in the lives of Tongans, the employment challenges brought on by the Global Financial Crisis and despite this, the achievements made by Tongans in the education and professional sectors.

The Prime Minister responded by thanking the community for the invitation to meet with them. He outlined the political reform process that Tonga has undergone referring to His Majesty King George Tupou V relinquishing executive power to Cabinet and the increase of the number of people's representatives in the Legislative Assembly from 9 to 17.

The Prime Minister noted initiatives the current government has undertaken since coming into office in December 2010, such as the restructure of the public service from 26 to 14 ministries by 1 July 2012, restructuring of overseas missions, a submarine communications fiber optic cable by mid 2013, Tonga's Energy Roadmap, improvements to the airports, wharfs and land transport and efforts to boost the economy by supporting the private sector.

The Commander of the Tonga Defence Services, Brigadier Tau'aika 'Uta'atu, followed by reporting on their visit to the Tongan troops serving in Afghanistan who are there as part of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to Afghanistan. Brigadier ‘Uta'atu referred to the history of the Tonga Defence Services and its work in the international arena dating back to the first and second World Wars, peacekeeping in Bougainville and the Solomon Islands and security assistance in Iraq and Afghanistan.

People's Representative to the Legislative Assembly for Tongatapu 10, Mr Semisi Tapueluelu followed by reporting on his work as an elected member of the House including his involvement in the Agricultural Select Committee that were recently in Vava'u, Ha'apai, 'Eua and Tongatapu.

The meeting concluded with the words of thanks by Tu'isoso on behalf of the Tongan community. Tu'isoso thanked the Prime Minister with appreciation for attending the meeting and sharing with the community the developments in Tonga.
The following day the Prime Minister was able visit the Tongan Community Center at Hawthorne to witness the center's activities. The Prime Minister noted the importance of the center's work in serving the Tongan community and thanked them for their efforts in preserving and promoting Tongan culture.

-ENDS

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