



**18<sup>th</sup> September 2018 A Deliberate Planning Conference on Disaster Planning and Preparedness was opened by the CEO for MEIDECC Mr. Paula Ma'u this morning at the Tanoa International Dateline Hotel. The four-day conference is jointly hosted by the National Emergency Management Office (NEMO), His Majesty's Armed Forces (HMAF) and the Nevada National Guard.**

Mr. Ma'u said that part of the exchange program last week included preparing and building the capacity of the National Emergency Coordination Centre at NEMO but this week will emphasise on disaster planning and preparedness to coordinate more effective and proactive activities in the next 2-3 years.

“This is well aligned with the ministry's target and remains our top priority to ensure state of readiness is firm and resilient. This is timely since we only have a few weeks before our cyclone season.”

He explained that when TC Gita hit Tongatapu and 'Eua earlier this year NEMO and its stakeholders made good preparatory work with the resources and efforts they had at the time and appropriate level of warnings were given.



“The immediate response was swift and encouraging from all stakeholders and also our development partners, whom some of you are here with us today.”

“Because of all this effort, the damages were kept to minimal and not to the level expected of a gigantic category 4 cyclone and of course there was no loss of life. The people, the communities and the stakeholders alike were resilient, worked together and they helped each other.”

He thanked the Nevada National Guard for their commitment and willingness to share their experiences which will assist NEMO, HMAF and its stakeholders to save lives in times of natural disasters.

Brigadier Gen. Doser said that the US government and Nevada National Guard and Tonga’s agency have similar approaches to disasters.

“In the end the goal is to save lives, ease suffering, protect critical infrastructure and certainly turn the response efforts back to the lowest level of government.”

Going forward Brigadier Gen. Doser believes that planning is critical for response and relevant stakeholders need to exercise the plan. He said the key is to plan accordingly after an event in order to better prepare for the next one and to prioritise needs immediately during a disaster.

The key outcome of the conference is to form a response plan to strengthen the government’s approach to disaster relief response and to include civil authority and the military component in the response as well.

Participants include 15 military personnel from the Nevada National Guard, representatives from Fiji, Kiribati, Tonga’s National Emergency Management Office and line ministries.

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