


www.ifrc.org  
Saving lives,  
changing minds.

# Information Bulletin

## Tonga: Tropical Cyclone Ian

 International Federation  
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

Information Bulletin n°1  
GLIDE n° [2014-000003](#)  
14 January 2014

This bulletin is being issued for information only and reflects the current situation and details available at this time. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) is not seeking funding or other assistance from donors for this operation.

[<click here for detailed contact information>](#)



Damage to homes on Lifuka Island, Ha'apai, Tonga. Photo credit: NZ Air Force (taken from <http://ocha.smugmug.com/>)

## The situation

Severe Tropical Cyclone (TC) Ian formed in the northwest of Tonga and southeast of Fiji waters on 6 January. TC Ian tracked southeast towards the Tongan Island groups of Vava'u (population 15,000) and Ha'apai (population 6016<sup>1</sup>) intensifying to Category 5, with wind speeds of more than 270 mph, before turning on a more southerly track. Tonga Red Cross Society (TRCS) alerted trained emergency response team (ERT) responders to stand by on 6 January 2014. After passing through the Vava'u group TC Ian passed directly over Foa, Lifuka, Kouvai (Ha'ano) and 'Uiha in the Ha'apai group of islands on Saturday, 11 January.

Some of the islands within the affected area are low lying and susceptible to sea level rises and storm surge. Storm surges in Kouvai (Ha'ano) that accompanied the event were estimated to be around 4-5 metres at their peak.

A state of emergency was declared for the divisions of Vava'u and Ha'apai on Saturday morning 11 January. So far only minor damages have been reported in Vava'u. Initial reports from the Ha'apai Division describe extensive damage to houses, storage facilities, plantation crops (fruit-bearing trees, such as banana and coconut) and a pier. Approximately 4,000 people sought refuge in evacuation centres, mostly churches.

<sup>1</sup> 2011 census data, government of Tonga

The Government of Tonga has not requested international assistance at this point but may consider after analyzing the initial response, distributions (Government and TRCS) and assessment detail. It is however accepting offers of assistance from international partners, including Australia and New Zealand.

The Ha'apai division comprises six districts<sup>2</sup> and 51 islands of which 17 are inhabited. According to 2011 census data the population of the Ha'apai group of islands is 6,650.

TRCS is leading initial damage assessments in many affected areas in close coordination with the government. On 12 January, TRCS reported that the following Ha'apai islands have been badly affected: Lifuka, Foa, Mu'omu'a, Ha'ano, 'Uiha and Lulunga. Accurate figures about the total affected population will be available once individual household assessments have been completed. TRCS has reported no damage to islands of Ha'afeva (centre) and Nomuka (southwest).

There is one death reported in the Pangai district and reports of 14 people sustaining minor injuries. Reports on those using evacuation centres range from 2,000-4,000.

There is significant damage to houses, some schools, and crops. There is also damage to the new causeway and foreshore on Foa island. Roads have been blocked with broken trees and debris but these are already being cleared. All the houses in Holopeka village, in the district of Pangai, have been damaged. Holopeka has a population of 411/ 27 households.

A Tongan VOA patrol boat left the capital, Nuku'alofa, at 8:00am on 12 January for Ha'apai. A second patrol boat departed Vava'u on the same day for Ha'ano. The patrol boat from Nuku'alofa is carrying emergency shelter materials, jerry cans and hygiene kits from the NEMO and TRCS. People on board the VOEs include officers from NEMO, the MET Office, TRCS, Military, Navy and representatives from the Ministry of Infrastructure.

## Red Cross and Red Crescent Action

TRCS disaster response capacity has been very visible from the onset of the TC warning. Trained emergency response teams were on standby from 6 January in Vava'u, Ha'apai and Tongatapu and branch officers in charge were in regular communication with respective district offices (government administration offices in each district).

TRCS has emergency non-food items pre-positioned in storage centres and containers in five different locations namely Tongatapu, Eua, Ha'apai, Vava'u and Niuatoputapu.

The National Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) was activated on 9 January and is operating 24 hours a day. To facilitate communications, the TRCS disaster management officer (DMO) was stationed at the EOC from 10-12 January. On the morning of 12 January, the DMO was deployed on a joint assessment mission with government staff teams. He deployed on the VOA patrol boat which is now assessing the impact of the cyclone on the southern islands of the Ha'apai group, also carrying additional shelter relief materials. A second vessel left Vava'u on the same day, with TRCS's ERT volunteers, to assist in assessing the Ha'apai group.

TRCS continues to liaise closely with other partners through the national EOC and by participating in the meetings of the Government's Committee for National Emergency Management. TRCS has two satellite phones which are facilitating communications from the affected areas.

Emergency response teams in Ha'apai were deployed and started joint assessments on the morning of 12 January with teams from the governor's office, district offices and other agencies.

---

<sup>2</sup> Pangai, [Foa](#), [Lulunga](#), [Mu'omu'a](#), [Ha'ano](#), ['Uiha](#)

## Tonga Red Cross Society (TRCS)

- TRCS has activated its ERTs. The Ha'apai branch officer in charge is leading the operation on the ground, currently working with a team of approximately 15 ERT volunteers. The DMO and logistics officer deployed to Ha'apai, with two experienced ERT members from Vava'u branch.
- The ERT teams are commencing individual household assessments in Foa and Pangai, and started relief distributions.
- TRCS's logistician is on Namuka, the southernmost island in Ha'apai group.
- TRCS Ha'apai branch office in Pangai has suffered minor damage and the branch is currently operating from the governor's office. The TRCS warehouse has sustained some damage to the roof; water has entered the facility and soaked/damaged cartons and packaging containing blankets and kitchen sets.
- Mobile and landline phone networks are down in the effected areas. Communications have been limited and the two TRCS satellite phones are the only means of communication.

## IFRC

IFRC has been in regular contact with TRCS since the cyclone warning was released. Following a request for assistance from TRCS, the IFRC Pacific regional office in Suva deployed its disaster management programme manager to support assessments on Ha'apai. He will return to TRCS headquarters later in the week to assist with response planning. IFRC has sent a number of updates to Movement partners since the cyclone warning was released and two DMIS reports have been posted.

IFRC has been participating in Pacific Humanitarian Team meetings to ensure coordination with other regional humanitarian actors.

## Other Movement partners

New Zealand Red Cross will deploy a delegate to Tonga on Tuesday, 14 January. This delegate will be responsible for the coordination between New Zealand Red Cross and Movement actors. Australian Red Cross has been liaising with TRCS and is discussing potential support options.

## Other actors

The Government of New Zealand sent an RNZAF P3 Orion aircraft to undertake a fly over of the Vava'u and Ha'apai districts islands on Sunday morning. The Government of Tonga is currently reviewing the photos. The NZ Government has made NZD 50,000 available to respond to any requests for assistance. OCHA has deployed an information management/GIS officer to support assessments and IM/GIS officer to support assessments and data collection. Digicel reported that the mobile network had been reinstalled.

---

## Contact information

**For further information specifically related to this operation please contact:**

- **Tonga Red Cross Society:** Sione Taumoefolau, Secretary General, office phone: + 676 21360 mobile: +676 8785761; email: [secretary.general@tongareddcross.org/redcross@kalianet.to/sione\\_ache@hotmail.com](mailto:secretary.general@tongareddcross.org/redcross@kalianet.to/sione_ache@hotmail.com)
- **IFRC Regional Office:** Aurélie Balpe, Head of Regional Delegation; office phone: +679 331 1855; mobile: +679 999 2485; email: [aurelia.balpe@ifrc.org](mailto:aurelia.balpe@ifrc.org)
- **IFRC Zone**
  - Christine Strater, Operations Coordinator; office phone: +603 9207 5814; mobile: +60 12 2130 149; email: [christine.strater@ifrc.org](mailto:christine.strater@ifrc.org).
  - Peter Ophoff, Head of PMER; office phone: +603 9207 5775; email: [peter.ophoff@ifrc.org](mailto:peter.ophoff@ifrc.org).

[Click here](#)

[Return](#) to the title page

---

#### How we work

All IFRC assistance seeks to adhere to the [Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations \(NGOs\) in Disaster Relief](#) and the [Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response \(Sphere\)](#) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable.

The IFRC's vision is to inspire, encourage, facilitate and promote at all times all forms of humanitarian activities by National Societies, with a view to preventing and alleviating human suffering, and thereby contributing to the maintenance and promotion of human dignity and peace in the world.

[www.ifrc.org](http://www.ifrc.org)  
Saving lives, changing minds.



The IFRC's work is guided by [Strategy 2020](#) which puts forward three strategic aims:

1. Save lives, protect livelihoods, and strengthen recovery from disaster and crises.
2. Enable healthy and safe living.
3. Promote social inclusion and a culture of non-violence and peace.