EU steps up humanitarian assistance to victims of Cyclone Gita in Tonga

Suva, 13 March 2018 – The European Commission is allocating a further €300 000 (TOP 790 860) in humanitarian funding to Tonga in order to enable the delivery of emergency assistance to communities affected by Tropical Cyclone Gita, which wreaked havoc across large parts of the country in mid-February. An initial €100 000 (TOP 263 620) had already been allocated immediately after the event, pending further field assessments. In addition, a humanitarian expert from the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) was immediately deployed to take part in a rapid assessment of the situation on the ground.

"Our assessment on the ground indicates that there are still many humanitarian needs to be addressed", said Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management Christos **Stylianides***. This additional contribution from the EU underlines our solidarity with the people of Tonga, many of whom have lost their homes and sources of livelihoods as a result of the cyclone. The extra funding will contribute to helping them get back on their feet as soon as possible*."

The EU interventions will focus on addressing the most pressing needs of the affected families through the provision of emergency shelter, access to safe drinking water, and food and livelihood assistance.

More than 80 000 people - approximately 80% of the country's total population - were affected when Cyclone Gita struck the archipelago island as a category 4 storm, with close to 5 000 people displaced in over 100 evacuation centres. The typhoon damaged some 3 000 homes, 10% of which were completely destroyed.

The EU funding is being made available via the European Commission's Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) via its small scale respond fund following the results of further needs assessments, which indicated humanitarian needs amongst the impacted communities remain high.

Background

Cyclone Gita made landfall on the islands of Tongatapu - home to Tonga's capital, Nuku'alofa - and Eua on 12th February. Packing average winds of 285 kilometres per hour, it was considered the worst storm to ever hit the Pacific nation, bringing torrential rains and strong winds that triggered extensive floods and knocked down numerous power lines in several towns, including Nuku'alofa. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) reports that around 20% of Tongatapu's houses sustained damage. This is in addition to damages on some essential public buildings, including hospitals and government premises.

As an immediate response to the devastation caused by Cyclone Gita, the European Union provided €100 000 last month to enable the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) to implement life-saving humanitarian activities in some of the worst-hit districts. In addition, a humanitarian expert from the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) was immediately deployed to take part in a rapid assessment of the situation on the ground, whilst the European satellite mapping system Copernicus was activated to provide detailed maps of the affected areas.

The European Commission's Small-scale Tool is a global fund which allows for rapid funding for up to €300 000 for humanitarian aid in countries affected by natural and man-made disasters.

For further information, please contact:
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