



For Immediate Release

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“Natural disaster funding secured to build community resilience in Tuvalu and Samoa”

Suva, Fiji Islands (March 18th 2008) – The Embassy of Finland in Canberra today signed a funding agreement with FSPI that aims to increase the resilience of communities in Tuvalu and Samoa to reduce their vulnerability to impacts of natural disasters. The project will look at incorporating traditional methods and where necessary will merge these practices with modern scientific and technical knowledge.

“Tuvalu and Samoa are ranked among the most vulnerable in the world to natural disasters. This funding agreement could not have come at a more opportune time given the international debates about impacts and vulnerabilities of small island developing states against natural disasters and climate change”, said Rex Horoi, Executive Director for FSPI.

In the 1990s alone, reported natural disasters cost the Pacific Islands region US\$2.8 billion¹. In Samoa, cyclone Heta caused considerable damage to agricultural products with approximately 10,000 households faced with food shortages and over 8,370 found that disaster severely reduced their income. Heta underscored Samoa’s permanent vulnerability to external shocks. While in Tuvalu has been predicted will suffer the greatest impact of climate change including disappearances in the worst –case scenario. The impacts particularly for atolls are likely to include reduced agriculture output, a decline in ground water quantity and quality substantial negative effects on health extensive capital damage and lost fish production².

“The Embassy of Finland in Canberra is happy to be able to get involved in this important work that FSPI and other NGOs in the region are doing, said Mr Juha Pyykko, Counsellor at the Finnish Embassy in Canberra who is in Suva for the signing of the agreement. “Sustainable development and poverty reduction are the core principles of Finnish development co-operation. With this project, I think we are working towards both of those objectives while addressing natural disaster prevention and climate change at the same time.”

Experience has shown that after extreme events island communities in Samoa and Tuvalu are isolated for several weeks due to a suite of factors including irregular transport; with strong seas delaying sea access; and airports closed due to heavy rains. As a consequence communities are not able to receive food assistance resulting in food crises which can last for several weeks depending upon the severity of a disaster. Food gardens, drinking water sources, fishing and traditional medicine grounds can take months if not years to recover increasing the vulnerability of these communities to health problems such as water borne diseases.

The response provided by NGOs and external agencies through provision of food aid and relief to the affected communities whilst always a welcome has not always helped in the long term. Instead it has created a culture of dependency in some cases on external assistance which has destabilised the indigenous coping mechanism and disempowered communities to respond to their own needs.

¹If Not But When A Policy Note 2006 <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPACIFICISLANDS/Resources/Natural-Hazards-report.pdf>

² UNDP 2002 Common Country Assessment Report

“Even with the proven advancement in disaster management in the Pacific region, immediately after a natural disaster communities in Samoa and Tuvalu continue to be vulnerable to natural hazards, said Roshni Chand, FSPI Regional Disaster Manager. Local communities had well developed traditional indigenous knowledge systems making them more resilient to coping to natural disasters. The project will look to enhance these traditional knowledge systems and where necessary merge these with modern scientific and technical knowledge”, she said.

The project will be implemented in Tuvalu by TANGO and in Samoa with Ole Siosiomaga who will work closely with their own National Disaster Management Office. “We would like to thank the Finland Government for this funding opportunity”, said Horoi.