

### Increase in aid budget welcomed, as Pacific faces crisis

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Aid charities welcomed the government's decision to increase the aid budget today with an additional \$55.6 million.

"Government budgets across the world are under huge stress, and it reflects the values of New Zealanders, that even in tough times we don't abandon our families and friends in our own region," says Josie Pagani, Director of the Council for International Development (CID).

Although New Zealand faces the decimation of its own tourism industry, in Pacific countries, tourism can be as high as 70% of GDP in the Cook Islands for example where up to 35% of the population is employed. In Vanuatu, also struck by Cyclone Harold during lockdown, tourism is about 47% of GDP and employs about 27%.

The sudden increase in unemployment is leading to food insecurity in some communities, an increase in law and order incidents, and challenging the ability of governments and businesses to pay salaries for those still in work.

"New Zealand's aid, along with Australia and other donors is more important than ever, both to respond to urgent need, and also to support the region to rebuild. We really do share a Pacific destiny. If we can keep COVID-19 out of the region, then we protect New Zealanders from a second wave too."

CID called on the government to accelerate planning for a Pacific Bubble with New Zealand and Australia so that the region can start to attract tourists in the near future.

Pacific community organisations have identified the following as priorities:

- **Food security and water** (support for primary producers to get food to markets, and to open up supply chains).
- **Strengthen the health system** (some countries have only a few ICU beds and little PPE equipment).
- **Make the borders safe** (support to have temperature checks and systems in place for tracing).

- **Digital connectivity** (so that health professionals for example can ‘sit in’ on operations and clinics while still in New Zealand).

“Now more than ever we have to get smarter at spending New Zealand’s aid dollars. It’s not just about increased funding. It’s about a new way of working, including greater collaboration amongst our charities, and with New Zealand businesses working in the Pacific, and government departments,” says Josie Pagani.

“New Zealand has a unique role globally to persuade others to speed up debt relief for some of the most indebted countries, while continuing to do our bit to respond to some of the worse humanitarian crises.”

According to the World Food Programme, more than thirty countries in the developing world could experience famine. There are already one million people on the brink of starvation as a result of COVID’19 lockdowns in some of the poorest countries.

The Council for International Development (CID) is the peak body for New Zealand’s international development and humanitarian aid sector.

**Contact:** Josie Pagani, Director for more information or to talk to Paul Ronalds

029 9050207 | [director@cid.org.nz](mailto:director@cid.org.nz)