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General Debate Speech

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Duration of speech: No longer than 3 minutes

Speech topic: Upholding humanitarian norms and supporting humanitarian action in times of crisis

Kia Orana Koutou Kātoatoa.

It's a privilege to address you today as a member of the New Zealand Parliament.

Times of crisis can be challenging, and New Zealand has a strong history of supporting humanitarian crises both in New Zealand and offshore.

As a Pacific country, the Pacific region is incredibly important to our Parliament, and New Zealand regularly provides humanitarian assistance to our Pacific neighbours. A number of humanitarian crises have been suffered throughout our region in the last five years, during which New Zealand has demonstrated ability and willingness to provide valuable and timely support.

When Tropical Cyclone Harold formed off the coast of the Solomon Islands in 2020, it capsized a ferry that killed 27 people, passed directly through the northern islands of Vanuatu causing widespread damage, as well as flooding and wind damage in Fiji and Tonga.

The Royal New Zealand Air Force (RNZAF) was deployed to Vanuatu to survey damage, assist in medical evacuations, and transport humanitarian supplies alongside providing support to Fiji.

Two years later in 2022, a submarine volcano erupted north of the Tongan island of Tongatapu. This caused significant damage, with at least four deaths and multiple injured.

Immediately following the eruption, New Zealand provided humanitarian funding to Tonga. Aircraft were deployed to survey the impact of the disaster, and multiple RNZAF C-130 Hercules carried relief supplies into Tonga.

A Royal New Zealand Navy (RNZN) ship was deployed to Tongan capital Nuku'alofa, where it produced potable water using the ships desalination equipment, and a team of hydrographers and divers surveyed shipping lanes and infrastructure for damage.

The 2024 Vanuatu earthquake claimed lives, destroyed critical infrastructure, and displaced over 2000 people. The magnitude 7.3 earthquake struck off the coast of Port Vila, causing significant damage and 14 deaths.

Again New Zealand responded. The New Zealand Defence Force delivered aid supplies and equipment – as well as disaster relief staff, including personnel from a unit based in my electorate of Palmerston North - to Port Vila.

But the support did not stop there. Communities from our South Pacific nation have increasingly become involved in providing humanitarian assistance to countries in need.

After Cyclone Harold caused damage in Vanuatu, a local community organisation filled thirty-two 50-litre boxes full of books, toys, puzzles and games, which were shipped to Vanuatu to help rebuild kindergartens devastated by the cyclone, and donated money for new playground equipment.

Similarly, the Tongan diaspora in New Zealand filled shipping containers with drums of food to be sent to Tonga after the 2022 volcanic eruption, with many of the drums addressed to family members of Tongans from my home city of Palmerston North.

What our communities achieved was not only impressive, but fantastic, and their effort acts as a beacon for other communities around the world. Some could only give something small, but when pooled together with many other donations, every contribution meant so much to the recipients in countries devastated by significant weather or natural disasters.

I strongly urge other parts of the world to look to where they can make humanitarian difference or impact. What communities in Aotearoa New Zealand have repeatedly demonstrated is that often you don't need to look far to find individuals and organisations willing and able to provide valuable assistance and aid recovery. Support can often be found in your own backyard.

No reira, tena koutou, kia manuia.