

Aid flights land in volcano-stricken Tonga amid shortage of clean water

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Nuku'alofa, January 20 (RHC)-- The first flights carrying aid have arrived in Tonga, five days after a powerful volcanic eruption blanketed the South Pacific island nation with ash, destroying homes and killing at least three people. Waves as high as 15 meters lashed parts of the archipelago with tsunami warnings issued as far away as the western United States.

The aid flights from New Zealand and Australia were finally able to land after runways were cleared of up to four inches of volcanic ash. The supplies come as tens of thousands of people face clean water

shortages.

Authorities say they are taking extra precautions to prevent COVID-19 from spreading to Tonga's islands as humanitarian workers arrive; Tonga has thus far been spared from the pandemic. As severed communications lines are restored, Tongans have been able to share with the world the devastation of Saturday's eruption and its aftermath.

Local journalist Marian Kup-u told reporters: "When the first explosion happened, ringing — our ears were ringing, and we couldn't even hear each other. So, all we do is pointing to our families to get up, to get ready to run, to evacuate. So that's what we — so that's what we did."

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