

SPC and Wallis and Futuna sign agreements to reduce natural disaster risk

Written by Naomi Jackson

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Tuesday 17 May 2011, Mataa'Utu, Wallis and Futuna – Wallis and Futuna will receive technical expertise and funding from the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) to mitigate the risks of natural disasters facing the territory. A signing ceremony took place today in Mataa' Utu, bringing together the European Union, SPC, and the Administration Supérieure (Office of the Chief Administrator for the territory of Wallis and Futuna)

The agreement worth €387,000 will support Wallis and Futuna in enhancing the safety of its people and infrastructure in the face of natural disasters, particularly tsunamis. Unlike the island of Wallis, the island of Futuna is highly exposed to tsunamis, as it lacks a coral reef.

This initiative falls under a larger regional project aimed at reducing disaster risk in Pacific overseas countries and territories, thereby benefiting New Caledonia, French Polynesia, Wallis and Futuna and Pitcairn Islands. The project is managed by SPC's Applied Geoscience and Technology Division (SOPAC) and funded by the European Development Fund.

In welcoming this partnership, SPC Deputy Director-General Richard Mann noted the 'importance of this agreement for the safety of people and infrastructure exposed to risks resulting from natural disasters.' He added that Wallis and Futuna would also benefit from regional exchanges with other Pacific territories and island countries to advance knowledge and practice in disaster risk mitigation, preparedness and response.

The Préfet (Chief Administrator of the territory) Michel Jeanjean noted that this agreement would reinforce existing disaster risk prevention measures with a view to improving the

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protection of the most vulnerable people of Wallis and Futuna. He added: 'We will do our utmost to utilise as best we can the funding allocated to us.'

EU Ambassador to the Pacific, Wiepke van der Goot, remarked that 'the priorities of Wallis and Futuna and the European Union converge when it comes to mitigating the consequences of natural disasters.' In addition to the SPC project benefiting Pacific overseas countries and territories, the European Union is funding a number of regional initiatives to reduce the risk of natural disasters, including a regional tsunami alert system and a regional emergency response platform.

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