

Guam looks to stronger ties with SPC/SOPAC

Written by Naomi Jackson

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Special Assistant External Affairs, Ms Telo Taitague, said that she looked forward to stronger links between Guam and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community/Applied Geoscience and Technology (SPC/SOPAC) Division.

Ms Taitague, who represented Guam at the 3rd Session of the Pacific Platform for Disaster Risk Management, said that communication, education and the need to gather data are the key lessons she would take home from the high-level conference held in Auckland New Zealand in early August.

“It is enlightening that a group like the SPC/SOPAC Division organises Platform meetings with experts from around the world and representatives from 22 Pacific Island nations and territories to discuss the ways to mitigate the impact of natural disasters and climate change adaptation. I have learnt that we need to measure if we wish to mitigate impacts.”

Ms Taitague’s role as advisor to the Governor of Guam includes the Emergency Operations Centre (EOC), and the current Administration was newly installed when, “We were alerted to the

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tsunami that hit Japan in March, so we had our first taste of an emergency situation.

Warnings went out, every public safety officer, every police officer was alerted, and people were evacuated from the shoreline, said Ms Taitague.

“Guam has been very blessed, unlike the Solomon Islands, or Samoa, Japan, New Zealand. The stories I have heard of people in the Solomon Islands running out to collect fish when the seawater receded, like kids in the candy store, they got buckets and filled them with fish. And then the tsunami came back and washed many of them away and they died. The message here is about educating the community,” said Ms Taitague.

Ms Taitague is concerned that a lack of reliable and consistent internet connection throughout the region makes it difficult for Governments and Ministries to access data, “and to share resources and information in times of danger.”

She believes that Guam can make a contribution to data gathering and formats to follow when it comes to a tsunami or a typhoon, and looks forward to further developing the relationship between Guam’s EOC and the SPC/SOPAC Division in the future.

“We are brothers and sisters of the Pacific, from Guam, Palau, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, everywhere in the region, we are all part of the Pacific Islands,” said Ms Taitague.

Photo captions:

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Vulnerable coastal housing in the Solomon Islands.