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HIGH COMMISSION OF THE KINGDOM OF TONGA

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Note No..33/2020

15<sup>th</sup> June 2020

Committee Secretary  
Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade  
Parliament of Australia  
**CANBERRA**

**Re: Call for Submissions – Australia-Tonga Defence Cooperation Program**

The High Commission of the Kingdom of Tonga is indeed grateful for the decision by the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade to allow submissions for the Inquiry into Australia's Defence relationships with Pacific Island nations. This is a positive outcome for Tonga and the Pacific to share Australia's contribution to enhance our bilateral relations and to ensure a region that is safe for all of us. This year marks 50 years of Diplomatic Relations between the Commonwealth of Australia and the Kingdom of Tonga. The Kingdom of Tonga would like to take this opportunity to further enhance our defence cooperation for the future security and safety of our bilateral relations.

Australia has been able to respond positively and appropriately to requests for support from Tonga in all levels within the Defence Cooperation Program (DCP) between Tonga and Australia. The Australia-Tonga Defence Cooperation Program focuses on areas that are mutually beneficial to both partners, such as to build His Majesty's Armed Forces (HMAF) capacity for the security of Tonga and to support our neighbours in the region.

The Tonga High Commission would like to convey these few points of cooperation between Australia and Tonga. However, these does not do justice for the outstanding and important relations that Tonga and Australia has shared over the years.

**1. High Level Engagement**

HMAF and the Australian Defence Force has maintained high-level engagement to coordinate and share our resources and experiences. An essential component for high-level engagement is sharing our views of the future and where we position our Services to prepare for the future. The annual Defence Cooperation Program meeting between Tonga and Australia is the official forum where engagement will review the DCP and define the way forward for the next 12 months.

The high-level engagement between Tonga and Australia maintain close defence cooperation and coordinate programs of the military to military cooperation. The Australian Chief of Defence (CDF) phone call during a cyclone or other challenging times for Tonga show genuine concern and care to support partners during such critical times.

## **2. Women Peace and Security**

Women Peace and Security initiated under Australia DCP is the recognition between Australia and Tonga that women have an important role in the security of the region. Tonga's intention is to effectively use available resources in Tonga, which include women in the military and security services. The first HMAF female officers were trained in Australia and were the beginning that all ranks will be open to females. Tonga has progressed in opening all trades to females except the infantry and patrol boat crew.

The annual Defence Female Rugby Seven-a-side Tournament hosted by the Australia Defence is a forum for females in the military to get together and share their experiences with others in the Pacific Islands, New Zealand and Australia. Feedback from these meetings on ideas to improve the condition of service for females or what opportunity is there for the future of women to contribute to the security of Tonga and the region.

## **3. Education and Courses**

The Defence Cooperation Program provides education and training opportunities to HMAF personnel. This is part of capacity building investing in human resources. Short training courses in military subject matter enable our members to improve their skills and their performance output. Australian Mobile Training Team is another method of delivery for short courses where a more significant number of students attend the course in the country.

Academic studies under the Defence Cooperation Program is a long-term investment in human resources. This is undertaken through the Australian Defence Force Academy or other universities in Australia. This program covers from an Officer Candidate in the Australian Defence Force Academy or the Royal Military College, Duntroon to mid-level and Senior Officers at the Command and Staff College and the Centre for Defence and Strategic Studies. Other opportunities for undergraduate and graduate programs in the University of Wollongong, ANU and the University of Canberra are also available for the HMAF under the Defence Cooperation Program.

#### **4. Maritime Security**

Maritime Security is the declared priority for His Majesty's Armed Forces, and Australia is the primary partner for Maritime Security. The main sub-program for Maritime Security is the Patrol Boat Program with Australia providing two Guardian Class Patrol Boat and a previous landing craft, a maintenance package and training package. This program enables Tonga to secure our maritime environment and support key civil agencies: Fisheries; Custom; Police and Health. For Tonga, collective security within the region is a natural step after national security. Tonga has used the Pacific Patrol Boats to contribute toward the security of neighbouring island states. In June 1993, the patrol boat VOEA PANGAI provided surveillance patrol to Tuvalu for six months before Tuvalu receive their Pacific Class Patrol Boat. In October 1994, VOEA PANGAI was deployed to Bougainville to support Operation Lagoon by policing between the Solomon Islands and Bougainville. Furthermore, in March 2015, the patrol boat VOEA NEIAFU was deployed to Vanuatu to support HADR after Cyclone PAM. The last deployment in February 2016 was VOEA PANGAI, and the landing craft VOEA LATE deployed to Fiji in support of HADR after Cyclone WINSTON. Through DCP, it has enabled Tonga to secure the maritime boundary and to support our neighbours during difficult times.

#### **5. 1<sup>st</sup> Construction Engineers Squadron**

HMAF 1st Construction Engineer Squadron (1CES) function is to provide HMAF with Construction Capability. Further to the Unit's core function, is to assist the civil authorities in construction disciplines in times of need, specifically in Natural Disasters, in the event of a declared State of Emergency and other global issues such as an Epidemic or a Global Pandemic (COVID -19).

The development of 1CES over the years while working together with the ADF under DCP. The DCP allows 1CES to introduce and develop skilled trade personnel, management, leadership training and funding of development projects. The Organization was established with a troop size carpentry-maintenance team that has now been developed to a full Vertical Construction Squadron. In the 1990s, 1CES worked along with a troop from 19 Construction Engineering Works (CE) Squadron ADF for the development of Taliai Camp.

#### **6. Land Force Partnership**

The Land Forces fully embrace the practicalities of partnership, cooperation, and Interoperability with its counterparts from other forces. The essential task is to develop its capabilities and capacities to effectively deploy as partners. The Land

Force training with partners can effectively plug into the amphibious task group lead by Australia.

The Defence Cooperation Program between Tonga and Australia has successfully achieved milestones in building the capacity of HMAF to provide security for the people of Tonga. Tonga and other Pacific Island states can help each other during a natural disaster and the security of their maritime environment. Through bilateral engagement with Australia under the Defence Cooperation Program, a network within the Pacific Island states can support the collective security of the region. The Defence Cooperation Program empowers the Pacific Island states to provide security within their countries and to support each other. Australia is an important partner of Tonga and the Pacific Defence Cooperation. Tonga is confident that given our defence cooperation there will be more opportunities in the future as we are all facing this unprecedented crisis of COVID-19.