

Tonga internet reconnected five weeks after volcanic eruption

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Debris from damaged buildings and trees are strewn about on Atata Island in Tonga, on January 28, 2022, following the eruption of an underwater volcano and subsequent tsunami.

Nukualofa, February 23 (RHC)-- Tonga's main internet connection to the rest of the world has finally been restored more than five weeks after a huge volcanic eruption and tsunami severed the undersea cable.

"People on the main island will have access almost immediately," Tonga Cable Chief Executive James Panuve told the Reuters news agency by telephone, after a repair ship handed over the restored cable on Tuesday afternoon.

School chaplain Penisimani Akauola Tonga was among those getting back online for the first time since the disaster struck the remote Pacific island nation in January. Tongans have been struggling with makeshift satellite services since the disaster. Three people in Tonga were killed by the tsunami, while dozens of homes were destroyed and drinking water was spoiled.

Tonga Cable's chairperson Samiuela Fonua told the Associated Press that about 90 kilometres (56 miles) of cable damaged by the tsunami had been replaced.

The company will now focus on repairing a second severed cable that connects some of the outer islands to the main island of Tongatapu, Fonua said. That cable runs close to the undersea volcano and the process could take as long as nine months.

Tonga has also been grappling with its first outbreak of the coronavirus, which may have been brought in by military teams who brought in humanitarian aid after the disaster. The outbreak has grown to more than 250 cases but no deaths have been reported.

Tongan health officials say that 90 percent of people aged 12 and older have had at least two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine.

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