

For Official Release
PR001-09042024
Office of the Governor
Utulei, American Samoa
September 04, 2024



The Official Opening of the Amerika Samoa 3rd Annual Resilience Summit 2024

The 3rd Annual Amerika Samoa Resilience Summit officially commenced today at the “Maota o Tupulaga” Methodist Hall Tafuna. The summit is being held for three days from September 3rd-6th and is hosted by the Office of Disaster Assistance and Petroleum Management (ODAPM) in partnership with the Governor’s Resilience Office (GRO), the American Samoa Department of Homeland Security (ASDHS) and the Office of Samoan Affairs (OSA). ODAPM Director Lisa Tuato’o served as the Master of Ceremony for the summit, welcoming esteemed federal, regional, and local dignitaries.

Senior Pastor Osasa Aukuso of the Firm Foundation American Samoa Worship Center Christian Church led the sermon with a Bible reading from the Book of Psalms 46:1-2, stating, “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth gives way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea.” Pastor Aukuso emphasized three key points for summit participants to contemplate: “Firstly, God is alive and He cares for He is our creator. Secondly, we must trust His Word. Thirdly, let us invite Him, welcome Him in all the endeavors of our lives.” Pastor Aukuso encouraged summit members to “put all their hopes and trust in our Lord. We will not have fear and, given this is a resilient summit towards natural disasters, this is a perfect example to trust in our God as He is our refuge.”

The Honorable Governor Lemanu P.S. Mauga delivered special remarks, expressing his gratitude to the people of American Samoa for hosting the summit and to distinguished group members for investing their time and effort into strengthening the resilience of our island. Governor Lemanu stated, “Today we reunite under the theme ‘Our Community, Our responsibility.’ This year’s theme captures the essence of the work we must do together as a government, as a community, and religious denominations. Different associations, different gatherings, and many others that are on our islands.” Governor Lemanu added, “As an island community, we know all too well

the challenge that climate change brings to our islands. These challenges demand more than resilience. They require collective effort and a shared commitment in protecting our home.” The Governor stated that the summit underscores the profound responsibility of ensuring American Samoa remains safe and prepared for what lies ahead. He emphasized that the power of community and cooperation can help us secure a brighter future for our islands, and further highlighted key components to mitigating disasters and providing funding opportunities. He explained to federal partners that the improvement of American Samoa’s resilience initiative relies on:

1. Differentiating territories and state benchmark on President’s Emergency Declaration
2. Utilizing Samoan guest houses as family homes (FEMA Initiative)
3. Categorizing our territories’ reef as an infrastructure
4. Building and maintaining seawalls and mountain roads

The Governor concluded his remarks by encouraging all participants to discuss these components, stating that they will be beneficial to American Samoa’s pursuit for disaster resilience.

The Honored Guest for the summit is His Excellency Ratu William Toganivalu who is the Fiji Roving Ambassador to Pacific Island Countries, Territories and Agencies of the Council of Regional Organizations of the Pacific. In his keynote address H.E. Toganivalu expressed his gratitude to be welcomed to American Samoa and has been struck by not only the similarities of our cultures but the complexity which differentiates them: “We are not only here as contemporary representatives of our communities, but we are here of cultural and collective memory of Pacific Islanders.” H.E. Toganivalu spoke on how cyclone Winston in 2016 devastated most parts of Fiji and the community's recovery was swift thanks to traditional knowledge and communal effort. “In Fiji, stories of villages rebuilding after the cyclones illustrate the power of collective resilience and integration of ancient practices with modern strategies.” H.E. Toganivalu credited our forefathers for instilling the knowledge for us to uphold our sacred lands and not only to be resilient but being able to sustain land for our benefit.

Congresswoman Uifa’atali Amata offered her support by encouraging the focus of the summit to submit any requests to the Federal level through her office. Stating: “Whatever is needed from the Federal level let me know. If you hear legislation that sounds good, through counterparts from other states or counterparts please contact our office. We are happy to examine it and if it is good for our islands and it is responsible for bipartisan legislation, we will be delighted to support it.”

This year's summit will open with high profile speakers throughout the day, round table discussions, on the whole community approach and methods conducted so far by sharing

strategies, research and pertinent critical information necessary in strengthening resilience in our territory. There will also be guest speakers from local, regional and federal partners to share the lessons learnt and best practices that can be adopted to strengthen our combined urgent efforts moving forward.

The first summit was held on September 27-29, 2022 with the theme “Bridging the Gap between Government and Communities,” in 2023 the theme was “Strengthening Disaster Resilience in our Community,” and this year’s theme is “Our Community, Our Responsibility.”

###



















