

SPINAL INJURY ASSOCIATION OF FIJI



MEDIA RELEASE: For Immediate Release

Disability Organisations Bring Relief to People Affected by TC Winston

Teams from the Spinal Injury Association of Fiji (SIA) and the Fiji Disabled Peoples Federation (FDPF) have been travelling to remote villages throughout Fiji over the past week to deliver much-needed mobility devices and assistance to disabled people who are still suffering after TC Winston.

The teams travelled by road and boat to reach remote areas throughout the country, assessing the needs of disabled people there and providing support packs and mobility devices made available through strategic partners Vodafone Fiji, PhysioNet UK and Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade.

For many of the people visited, this was the first aid they had received since the devastating cyclone in February, and they were grateful for the support.

Salanieta Rokoca from Rabulu Village in Ra said: "Thank you so much for the assistance that has arrived this morning. I never dreamt that this would also happen to me, because for so long I have tried to seek assistance for my welfare support and have not succeeded. I feel and truly believe that this team is God sent in donating a walker and other items to me. This assistance will greatly support my daily life and health."

Sarofe Rapeka of Draunivi Village in Ra, who is also deaf, added: "It is so good to see you, to have people come to visit me and to help me. Bringing me these gifts will make such a big difference to my life. God bless."

Many of the dozens of people visited by the team were in tears after receiving their aids, including Yankel Samy, a 64-year-old living in Navaki Settlement in Nadi who is paralysed and speech impaired and has been unable to get out of bed for years; and Hanifa Bibi also of Navaki Settlement. Hanifa is frail and elderly with Parkinson's disease and until the team delivered her walker she had been completely unable to get around or leave the house. Another elderly villager from Tavualevu Village in Tavua Town had been using a small stick to support himself and was in constant back pain until the team gave him a proper walking aid.

The team also took time out to deliver children's books to a special needs school at Rakiraki.

The visit was well timed as SIA's Executive Director, Joshko Wakaniyasi, was attending a 3 day 'Tropical Cyclone Winston Lessons Learned' workshop organised by the Ministry of Rural & Maritime



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Development and National Disaster Management. Joshko was the only wheelchair user to be invited and said of the workshop: “The key stakeholders were all at the workshop, including government, civic society organisations, corporates and international agencies

“What I now hope for is that the recommendations coming out of the workshop start to get traction. Timing is very important as the cyclone season is an annual one. We may not be able to forecast the category of cyclone but we can be more prepared and resilient if there is genuine collaboration and working together between the key stakeholders.”

For more information on the work of the Spinal Injury Association visit:
www.facebook.com/spinalinjuryfiji or call 330 7908.

*****ENDS*****

Notes for Editors

Spinal Injury Association (SIA) of Fiji was first developed in the 1970s by a few spinal injured persons who were entering disabled people under 2019s sports tournaments at the time. The SIA was registered in 1994 as a non-governmental organisation and affiliated to the Fiji Disabled Persons Federation and the Fiji National Council for Disabled Persons. Since its establishment, the SIA has always striven to improve the lives of persons living with a spinal cord injury and physical impairment in Fiji with services for its members, including the provision of mobility equipment and medical supplies.

The organisation also works to develop strategies to improve the living standards and independence of member through workshops for training, capacity building, employment opportunities, fundraising and provision of walking aids and wheelchairs. The SIA focuses on people who have a physical impairment, including those with a spinal cord injury. Members are drawn from all over Fiji, and the organisation works nationally. The Constitution of the Association states that all people who use a wheelchair (permanently) may become members.

In more recent years, the SIA has had an increasing focus on service delivery; and has become the main provider of mobility devices for people with a mobility disability living in the community in Fiji. Initially mobility devices were provided directly to individuals on receipt of donated equipment from overseas.

Following training delivered in Fiji for SIA volunteers and Fiji National University physiotherapy and community rehabilitation assistant students, the process of provision of equipment has changed to include an element of assessment, prescription, fitting and follow up. In addition, the SIA have become increasingly selective regarding the quality and type of mobility equipment being donated.

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To date, the SIA mobility device services are run almost fully by volunteers, with extremely scarce resources. Currently the organisation has a total of 16 staff including volunteers and works across two sites, the main office located with other Disability Organisations and the second site at the Rehabilitation Hospital which is approximately 8km between each site.

More photos / interview available on request.

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