
Tonga volcano eruption. Father Hashda (PIME): "Volcanoes are a calculated risk"

"Volcanic eruptions are frequent here. This is not a new phenomenon. We are perfectly aware that this is a seismic zone and thus tsunamis or volcanic eruptions could occur at any time." Contacted by phone by the editorial staff of *Popoli e Missione*, Father **Dominique Hashda**, missionary and parish priest at the PIME mission in Papua New Guinea, reports on the situation on the ground. "We are well and have not been affected by the volcanic eruptions. The sea is calm now, but Tonga was hit by a disaster", he remarked



"Usually, when these phenomena occur, our response as PIME Fathers is immediate", he explains. "In the case of the islands of Tonga, we have not been asked for help, also because we are several kilometres away, but our confrere Fabio Motta left a few days ago for a nearby island and will be returning tomorrow." Fr Dominique is currently in the town of Alotau, in the province of Milne Bay. He points out that volcanic eruptions are a calculated risk. "Almost all of our missions are in Milne Bay: fortunately we are safe here and there has been no damage, although when volcanoes erupt you definitely feel it!". **Poor and fragile houses.** This is a problem for the local inhabitants: "People's homes are traditional structures made of poor materials, built with timber from the forest. The houses of the missionaries and the nuns, the hospitals and the schools are constructed with concrete masonry. But the villagers' dwellings are fragile and could easily collapse," he says. He adds that on one of these islands, where his confrere Father Giovanni is based, "boiling water is coming out of the ground and out of the rocks, and we know that the volcano is still active". **"They destroy whatever is there."** "Every so often volcanoes wake up and erupt, destroying everything around. Eruptions trigger tsunamis and cyclones arriving from the sea, like the one in 2019, named Goodenough." On that occasion, the cyclone destroyed parishes and hospitals: "Italy responded promptly and effectively; they helped us a lot that year." **The activities of the mission.** Goodenough is the island chosen by PIME for evangelism in Papua New Guinea in the 1980s, where Father Giovanni Mazzucconi was martyred in odium fidei. "The parish also has a vocational training school, a hospital, laboratories, a primary and secondary school and three primary schools. All of the teachers and students reside here in the parish," explains Father Dominique, as he bids us farewell with words of hope.

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