



## PRESS RELEASE

### Apia, 11 July 2022 – *COVID-19 AND HUMAN RIGHTS: THE CASE OF SAMOA*

On 30 June, the Office submitted its eighth State of Human Rights Report (SHRR) to Parliament as mandated by section 40 of the *Ombudsman Act 2014* – where the Office is required to submit to the Legislative Assembly a report on the human rights situation in Samoa every year.

The Office's 2022 SHRR focused on COVID-19 and the impact of the pandemic and measures taken by the Government on the rights and freedoms of Samoans especially on vulnerable groups.

Calls for submission to inform the Report opened in September 2021 and closed in March 2022. Community consultations were carried out in both Upolu and Savaii in March 2022. Businesses and civil society groups were also consulted and the Government through NEOC.

The Report found that COVID-19 brought about various challenges to Samoa's economy, and together with the Government's measures, significantly impacted the rights and freedoms of all Samoan citizens with the most vulnerable suffering the most given existing inequalities. Various rights and liberties including civil and political as well as economic and social rights were significantly impacted by lockdowns restricting freedom of movement and the right to education for children. The right to health inherent to the right to life was severely impacted and the pandemic has and continues to test the ability of the Government to protect such a fundamental right.

The Report commended the Governments response efforts in providing support and ensuring that every citizen's health and safety was safeguarded, however it notes that more work is still needed especially in relation to ensuring better coordination and planning, especially in information sharing; strengthening the protection of all vulnerable groups and ensuring their needs are considered in the Government's COVID-19 response; as well as improving and strengthening cooperation, accountability and oversight, and the participation of various stakeholders in decision making.

Taking these considerations into account and other human rights principles discussed throughout the Report will not only highlight the Government's interest in applying a human rights-based approach in its response to pandemics but also its commitment to ensuring that the human rights of citizens are continuously safeguarded in public health emergency situations.

The Report makes various recommendations for the Government to consider and implement to ensure an effective and inclusive response to COVID-19 in Samoa now and for any future public health emergency that threatens the lives of our people.

For more information and to get a copy of our Report please consult the following link:  
<https://ombudsman.gov.ws/office-of-the-ombudsman-launches-first-ever-state-of-human-rights-report/>

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NOTE: All media queries must be emailed to Tracey Mikaele (Director Communications & Engagement) at [t.mikaele@ombudsman.gov.ws](mailto:t.mikaele@ombudsman.gov.ws)