



August 26, 2020

Countrymen, women and people of the Territory of American Samoa:

Due to the Coronavirus Pandemic onset at the beginning of the year, the territory's borders were closed as a preventive measure for any contraction of this said virus into the territory. The governor and territorial leaders quick response to mitigate any disaster onto our shores is greatly applauded. The last commercial flight arriving and departing the territory was in March. The news of cancelled flights into the territory was devastating to everyone on travel for medical follow ups, business meetings, personal business and fa'alavelaves. But despite our disappointments, we believe that our government leaders' decision to close our borders was a necessary and wise action. At the time, government officials and health professionals were unsure of how to treat the virus.

Although the number of deaths in the U.S has increased, mostly due to behaviors and a lack of a national plan, there have been successful testing and preventive measures taken to prevent the spread of the virus and to treat the most severe cases. The Cares Act has also provided much financial assistance to help the territory ensure the safety of our residents.

It's now approaching six months since the government ordered the border closed. A few of us are in stable living situations, but the majority are not as fortunate. People have shared stories of experiencing mental, physical and financial stress as a direct result of being separated from families, and not knowing when they will be allowed to return home.

We continue to live in limbo with our families and friends in the U.S. They have shown nothing but patience and love for stranded folks. But we are all only humans and now we are beginning to experience signs of real mental anguish, never mind the financial stress. We don't have access to free health care. Because we are not residents, we don't qualify for any of the Cares Act assistance available in the U.S. We, the 375+ people of American Samoa, which include elderly, young children, individuals and families – are left to fend for ourselves. There is no official communication line from our government to update us on their plans to repatriate us. No one lives rent free in America. And we should be entitled to some assistance from our government through the Cares Act funding. We are directly impacted by the Corona Virus pandemic.

American Samoa is one of the only places that is COVID free. We are grateful. Really we are. But American Samoa is likely the only territory in the Pacific or country in the world that has not repatriated its own people to its homeland. Independent Samoa has repatriated its people. Fiji has repatriated its people. Tonga has repatriated its people. All countries in the Pacific have implemented some plan to repatriate its people. That's what governments do. Take care of its people. All of its people. American Samoa has done nothing for those of us



stranded nor our families in the U.S. There has been no effort to extend any assistance, financial or otherwise, to help residents of the territory stranded off-island. The news reports of extended border closing month after month has become unbearable and heart wrenching to hear. We, off-island stranded residents, can only assume we are not a priority. We are not important. We are not people of the Territory of American Samoa.

It is now August and more than 375 of us remain stranded off-island with yet no help or relief from our government. The June, July, August and September flights have all been cancelled. Additionally, there are 30+ US residents stranded on the island.

We are residents of American Samoa. We are constituents and tax payers of ASG. Further, our lives have been halted, livelihood abrupt and families separated. We have little children, elderly parents, husbands and wives on the island that desperately need us home. Our livelihood is in American Samoa.

This virus may not have affected us yet, but the stress and depression toll will. The burden of being separated from our children and families at home is beginning to take effect as seen in the many testimonials and videos we have procured on the “Tagata Tu Fa’atasi Alliance of American Samoa” facebook group page.

On behalf of the people of the Territory of American Samoa, we say, don’t be the only country in the world that has not repatriated its people to its homelands. Don’t be the only country that has abandoned its people. Let that not be part of our territory’s legacy.

Our honorable leaders, please reconsider your plans and open at least 3-4 flights with limited seating, require negative COVID-19 testing for check in, 14-day quarantine upon arrival, and other preventive measures the health department deems necessary for all incoming persons. A comprehensive plan as a guideline was outlined in both our 1st and 2nd letters that were posted on Samoa News.

Enclosed is a list of your residents American Samoa. All 375 (and counting) of us who are stranded off-island by no fault of our own, we have also included a list of the 30 US residents who need to return to their homes. We are all pleading to return home in a safe and measured manner. We Matter Too!!

For additional information please contact the Tagata Tu Fa’atasi Alliance of American Samoa at ttfaas2020@gmail.com.