

F. 4/2/1



*Ministry for Foreign Affairs
Nuku 'alofa
Kingdom of Tonga*

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Tonga presents its compliments to the World Health Organization and has the honour to convey the attached nomination letter with supporting documentations in favour of Honorable Dr. Saia Ma'u Piukala, Minister of Health, the Government of Tonga's nomination to the position of *Regional Director of the World Health Organization Western Pacific Office*.

The Ministry also further the honour to seek the assistance in conveying the attached letter and supporting documentations to its highest destination.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Tonga avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the World Health Organization the assurances of its highest consideration.

World Health Organization

GENEVA

18th July 2023



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*Minister of Foreign Affairs
Nuku'alofa
Kingdom of Tonga*

14 July 2023

Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus
Director-General
World Health Organisation
Geneva
Switzerland.

Dear Director-General,

Nomination of the Government of the Kingdom of Tonga to the position of Regional Director of the World Health Organization Western Pacific Office

I am pleased to convey that His Majesty's Government wishes to endorse the Hon Dr Saia Ma'u Piukala as the Government of the Kingdom of Tonga's candidate to the position of Regional Director of the World Health Organization's Western Pacific Office.

Hon Piukala is currently Tonga's Minister of Health and has built for himself a distinguished career in the health sector not just in Tonga and the Pacific, but globally.

In addition to being a Cabinet Minister, his long and illustrious career includes positions such as Member of the Executive Board for the World Health Organization (WHO) from 2019 and 2022 and Commissioner for the High-Level Commission on NCDs for WHO from 2018-2020. He has worked across the region in Fiji, Niue, Nauru and Tuvalu, and is the current Chair of the Pacific Ministers of Health Group.

Hon Piukala was actively engaged in the WHO initiative to develop one of the key pathways for achieving Universal Health Coverage. He has collaborated with bilateral and multilateral partners to complete Tonga's "National Safe and Affordable Surgery, Obstetrics and Anaesthesia Plan 2023-2030". This plan is due to be launched shortly and will be one of the first completed plans in the Pacific.

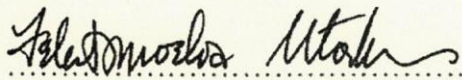
Hon. Piukala has a strong interest in population and development matters, particularly those related to youth and health. He has a particular interest in non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and his other interests include Universal Health Coverage and Emerging Infectious Diseases.

On the national front, he has led Tonga's response to the Hunga-Tonga Hunga-Ha'apai volcanic eruption, subsequent tsunamis and community transmission of COVID-19. He was responsible for Tonga's high COVID19 vaccination rate, building of a COVID19 treatment facility and strengthened lab capacity. As a result, Tonga saw very few deaths as a result of the pandemic, equivalent to a Case Fatality Rate of less than 0.1%, one of the lowest in the world.

The WHO Western Pacific Office provides an important opportunity to deliver strong health outcomes for Pacific Member countries. The office must be led by a strong, well-qualified leader. Hon Dr Saia Ma'u Piukala will be an excellent candidate for the Pacific and member countries alike.

We highly commend Dr Piukala as the first Pacific islander to this very important role.

Sincerely



Honourable Fekitamoeloa 'Utoikamanu
Minister for Foreign Affairs



Personal Details

Family Name	Piukala
Given Name:	Saia Ma'u
Date of Birth:	4 th July, 1969
Gender	Male
Nationality:	Tongan
Diplomatic Passport:	D810015
Residency Status	Citizen of Tonga
Postal Address:	Ministry of Health, Tonga Vaiola Hospital PO Box 59 TONGA
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Hon Dr Saia Ma'u Piukala

Minister of Health



Contact

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Profile

Hon Dr Saia Ma'u Piukala is a Member of Parliament and Minister of Health in the Kingdom of Tonga. He was the former Chair of the Parliament Standing Committee on Population and Development. Prior to entering politics in 2014, he was a General Surgeon and Medical Superintendent of Vaiola Hospital, Ministry of Health in Tonga.

Hon. Piukala has a strong interest in population and development matters, particularly those related to youth and health. He has a particular interest in non-communicable diseases (NCDs). His other interests include Universal Health Coverage and Emerging Infectious Diseases. He has led the work on Sustainable Development Goals for Tonga.

Hon Piukala is a Life Member of the Pasifika Medical Association (PMA).

He was a Member of the Executive Board for the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2019 and 2022 and was appointed as one of the Commissioners for the High-Level Commission on NCDs for WHO in 2018-2020.

Since January 2022, he has led Tonga's response to the Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha'apai volcanic eruption, subsequent tsunamis and community transmission of COVID-19. He has worked across the region in Fiji, Niue, Nauru and Tuvalu, and is the current Chair of the Pacific Ministers of Health Group.

During his distinguished career he had led many initiatives which have made a significant impact these include.

National Safe and Affordable Surgery, Obstetrics and Anesthesia Plan 2023-2030

Hon Saia Piukala has actively embraced and participated in the WHO initiative to develop one of key pathways for achieving UHC for all. Based on this framework, he has collaborated with overseas partners to complete Tonga's "National Safe and Affordable Surgery, Obstetrics and Anesthesia Plan 2023-2030". This plan is due to be launched shortly. It will be one of the first completed plan in the Pacific.

This work was a result of recommendations by the Lancet Commission on Global Surgery.

Achievements

Covid19 Response and Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha'apai volcanic eruption response

The Kingdom of Tonga was faced with two disasters in early 2022 which significantly impacted the health of people in Tonga. HTHH volcanic eruption and tsunami hit Tonga on 15th of January 2022. This was followed shortly on 1st February 2022 by the first Covid19 community outbreak, since Covid19 was declared a Global Pandemic, in March 2020.

Tonga declared a State of Emergency and the National Emergency Management Committee (NEMC) was activated in line with Disaster Management Act. The NEMC was also tasked by Cabinet to be the Covid19 National Task Force (NTF). Its main functions were to provide oversight on all disaster plans and their implementations, in order to mitigate, respond and rebuild back better, from impacts of HTHH disaster and the Covid19 outbreak. Planning and implementation were largely done by the Cluster Systems in place. Minister of Health was the co-chair with Minister of MEIDECC (Ministry that is responsible to Natural Disasters) for the NEMC/NTF and provided significant leadership in the Kingdom during this time ensuring lifesaving effective responses to these two unprecedented disasters.

Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha'apai volcanic eruption response

The response included strengthening the capability of Health-WASH cluster to provide a response plan, deploy a TEMAT team, maintain health service access in affected areas. There was strong collaboration with development partners in terms of strengthening preparedness and response capabilities related to Health, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene standards, to be available as necessary. Psycho-social support for both victims of the disasters as well as front line workers was sourced through effective collaboration between MOH teams and overseas teams who provided timely supports all the time.

Covid19 Community outbreak

Hon Piukala led the response to protect the health of people in Tonga by implementing strengthening and preparedness plans including:

- High COVID-19 vaccination coverage rate.
- Laboratory capacity was further strengthened.
- A COVID-19 treatment facility was quickly built.
- Surveillance processes were implemented to facilitate contact tracing, port of entry surveillance and establishment of Quarantine facilities.
- Risk Communication and Community Participation activities were conducted.
- Brief lockdowns to control peaks of outbreak;
- Swift cabinet decision based on MOH recommendations;
- Solidarity with people of Tonga. This required strong political leadership both from Minister of Health and Government of Tonga.

As a result of these effective public health actions, Tonga saw only 12 deaths due to COVID-19 out of more than 16,000 confirmed COVID-19 cases. Equivalent to a Case Fatality Rate of less than 0.1%, which would be amongst the lowest in the world.

Education

Fiji School of Medicine (FSM), FIJI / University of the South Pacific (USP), FIJI

2009 Master of Medicine in Surgery
2005 Post Graduate Diploma in Surgery
1995 Bachelor of Medicine and Surgery

University of the South Pacific, FIJI

1989 Foundation Studies Certificate

Va'vau High School, TONGA

1988 New Zealand University Entrance
DUX Va'vau High School



Work Experience

Minister of Health

2014 – 2019, 2021 – Current

Kingdom of Tonga

Member of Parliament

2014 – Current

Kingdom of Tonga

Vice-Chair Special RCM Session (WPRO)

27th – 28th February 2023

Manila, Philippines

Vice-Chair 73RD Special RCM Session (WPRO)

24th – 28th October 2022

Manila, Philippines

Member of Executive Board

World Health Organization

Geneva, Switzerland

2019 – 2022

Member of WHO Independent High Level Commission on NCD

Feb 2018 – Feb 2020

Minister of Health

Kingdom of Tonga

Minister of Public Enterprises

Minister of Internal Affairs

2018 – 2019

Medical Superintendent

Vaiola Hospital

Kingdom of Tonga

2014

Senior Medical Officer/General Surgeon/Locum

2003-2014

- Worked in a variety of roles as a Senior Medical Officer/General Surgeon
- Locum in a number of countries including Fiji, Niue, Tuvalu and Nauru

International Meetings

Hon. Dr Saia Ma'u Piukala was appointed to the WHO Executive Board in 2019 and 2022.

2022 Meeting

1. 75th WHA Meeting for Members of WHO at Geneva, Switzerland 22nd – 28th May, 2022.
2. PMA 2022 Annual Conference Meeting in Wellington, NZ 4th – 6th September, 2022.
3. Asia Pacific Parliamentarian Forum on Global Health at Seoul, South Korea on 24th – 26th August, 2022.
4. 73rd Session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Western Pacific Region at Manila, Philippines from 24th – 28th October, 2022. Special Session 24th.
5. Launch of the Global Report on Health Equity for Persons with Disabilities at Geneva, Switzerland on the 2nd December, 2022

2023 Meeting

1. Visit Shriner's Hospital, Hawaii to renew Country Agreement between Shriner's Hospital and Ministry of Health, Tonga - 13th – 15th February, 2023
2. Attend Tonga Nurses Association USA Annual Celebration from 17th – 18th February, 2023.
3. 2nd Special Session of WHO's Regional Committee for Western Pacific Region at Manila, Philippines from 27th – 28th of February, 2023.
4. 76th WHA in Geneva 21st – 29th May, 2023.
5. SIDS Ministerial Meeting on NCD/Mental Health in Barbados 14th – 16th June, 2023.
6. PHMM in Tonga from 20th - 22nd September, 2023.
7. RCM in Manila, Philippines 16th – 20th October, 2023



Hon Dr Saia Ma'u Piukala's competency with regard to the qualifications and characteristics as required by the Pacific Health Ministers nomination process.

1

A strong technical and public health background and extensive experience in international health

Hon Dr Piukala has almost 30 years of experience in health working primarily in Tonga but also across a few the Pacific countries.

He specialised in Surgery and was one of the senior surgeons with the Ministry of Health becoming the Medical Superintendent for the main referral hospital in Tonga in 2014.

Since becoming a politician and subsequently the Minister of Health, he has become more involved in regional and international health issues.

In the Pacific region he is the current Chair of the Pacific Health Ministers Meeting.

The ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic has been an important part of Hon Dr Piukala's responsibilities.

Tonga's response to COVID-19's community spread occurred shortly after the once in a hundred year undersea volcanic eruptions and subsequent tsunamis.

Tonga's response was very successful with a good vaccination rate and less than 12 lives were lost. This was testament to the strong leadership and close collaboration among stakeholders and partners.

Hon Dr Piukala has been a strong advocate for safe surgery and Tonga's own "National Safe and Affordable Surgery, Obstetrics and Anesthesia Plan 2023-2030" will be launched shortly. It will be among the first to be completed in the Pacific.

Tonga continues the work to address the NCD epidemic and Hon Dr Piukala provides oversight for the only Health Promotion Foundation in the Pacific region – a statutory body established to lead and facilitate the national efforts against NCDs.

An improved health information system linking the hospitals and health centres has recently been launched in Tonga. This is an USD \$8M initiative with the Asia Development Bank (ADB) and ensures that health information reflects a patients episode of care from a community to hospital setting and vice versa.

2

Competency in organizational management

As the Minister of Health, Hon Dr Piukala leads an organisation of over 1,300 staff with a budget of TOP \$72 million. His achievements with health are highlighted elsewhere.

In addition to being the Minister of Health, Hon Dr Piukala was also the Minister for Public Enterprise in 2017 and 2018.

During this time, he was responsible for leading all Public Enterprises and notable highlights from this period are as follows:

- Public Enterprises Compliance and Performance
 - Performance and compliance in accordance with Public Enterprise Act
 - 100% annual reporting and audited financial statements.
 - 30% increase in budget for the Ministry.
- Public Enterprise Reforms
 - Tonga regarded leading in implementing reform in State Owned Enterprises in the Pacific.
 - Shared directors' initiatives implemented for the Public Enterprises. This meant merging several boards along Utilities, Communications and Property to yield efficiencies in productivity and service delivery.
 - Led the Ministry's efforts to diversify energy sources to renewable ones.
- Reduction of Public Enterprise Tariffs
 - During this period there was a reduction in tariffs for electricity, water, and internet in public places.

Hon Dr Piukala was also the Minister for Internal Affairs in 2018 and 2019. Notable highlights from this period include the following:

- Advancing the Labour Mobility Scheme by negotiating the Pacific Labour Scheme (PLS) with the Australian Government. Labour mobility is the main source of remittances for Tonga, and its multiplier effect is well acknowledged at all levels in Tonga.
- Led and approved the Labour Mobility Policy, which is the key guide for Overseas Employment opportunities.
- Championed the mainstreaming of Gender through Women Affairs Division, which is now Women Affairs and Gender Equality Division.
- Led and approved the National Youth Policy which is now implemented and guide the youth activities implemented by the Youth Division

3

Evidence of public health leadership

Hon Dr Piukala has been a public health leader throughout his tenure as a Member of Parliament and Minister.

In recognition of his leadership in public health and specifically on NCDs, he was appointed as one of the Commissioners for the High-Level Commission on NCDs for WHO in 2018-2020.

Climate Change remains the main challenge for Pacific islanders and Climate Change and Health are an important aspect of the public health work.

During his time as a Minister, Hon Dr Piukala initiated and completed the work of relocating one of the hospitals in the outer islands to a safer location in adapting to Climate Change.

He is also a champion of multi-sectoral collaboration to address health challenges. Hon Dr Piukala recently launched the Guidelines to Healthy Living which is a collaboration between the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education and Training and the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forestry.

Legislative changes are also an important part of addressing Health and in NCDs, Tonga has among the highest rates of excise tax for tobacco products and currently under discussion is the inclusion of plain packaging in the legislation – a first for the Pacific.

4

Sensitivity to cultural, social, and political differences

Hon Dr Piukala grew up in Tonga and has been exposed to many different cultures with the Pacific region and beyond.

He has worked in several countries including Fiji, Niue, Nauru, and Tuvalu.

This he has been able to accomplish well due to his ability to work across different cultures, religious beliefs, and political affiliations.

As a politician he has been a Member of Parliament for his constituency since he first stood for Parliament and during this time, he has had experience in being in government and in opposition.

Hon Dr Piukala has a very pleasant personality and people find him very easy to get along with.

5

A strong commitment to the work of WHO

Since becoming the Minister of Health, Hon Piukala has become very involved in WHO's work.

At a national level, he works very closely with the WHO Country Liaison Officer progress mutually beneficial health priorities.

At the Western Pacific Region level, he has been advocating and championing a number of initiatives around non-communicable diseases (NCDs), safe surgery, climate change and health and disaster preparedness and response.

Hon Dr Piukala was Vice Chair of the Regional Committee Meeting (RCSS1 and RCSS2) over the past year. A number of issues discussed including the following:

- NCD prevention and control
- The Regional Action Framework for Noncommunicable Disease Prevention and Control in the Western Pacific was endorsed.
- Primary health care
The Regional Framework on the Future of Primary Health Care in the Western Pacific was endorsed.
- Reaching the unreached
The Regional Framework for Reaching the Unreached in the Western Pacific (2022–2030) was endorsed.
- Cervical cancer
The Strategic Framework for the Comprehensive Prevention and Control of Cervical Cancer in the Western Pacific Region 2023–2030.
- Mental health
The Regional Framework for the Future of Mental Health in the Western Pacific 2023–2030.

Hon Dr Piukala has also been a member of the Executive Board until 2022.

- He was appointed as a member of the Dr LEE Jong-wook Memorial Prize Selection Panel for the duration of his term of office on the Executive Board.

Other major items at this time included:

- Involvement of non-state actors in governing body sessions.
- Standardization of medical devices nomenclature.

Through his association with the Country Office and CLO, the WPRO team and through the RCM, the WHA and his involvement as the WHO Executive Board, Hon Dr Piukala has been able to have first-hand knowledge and involved with the people WHO's work.

6

The good physical condition required of all staff members of the Organization

Hon Dr Piukala is healthy and values personal health.

He is a non-smoker and non-alcoholic and a keen golf player.

7

Sufficient skill in at least one of the working languages of the Regional Committee

Hon Dr Piukala has advanced ability in the English language.

In addition, he is also fluent with his native tongue of Tongan.