



Office of the Humanitarian Coordinator for Vanuatu

**STATEMENT BY THE HUMANITARIAN COORDINATOR FOR VANUATU,
OSNAT LUBRANI**

(Port Vila, 21 March 2015) It is one week since Cyclone Pam struck Vanuatu, bringing widespread devastation to the island nation and leaving some 65,000 people homeless. Aerial surveys from the outer islands confirm widespread destruction of homes, buildings and crops. Seventeen people have lost their lives.

The Government is leading the relief effort, under the supervision of the Prime Minister's office. The national disaster authorities have undertaken a number of assessments of the hardest hit areas in Malampa, Penama, Shefa, Sanma and Tafea provinces, and we know that people need food, clean drinking water, medical supplies, shelter, hygiene kits and seeds.

I visited the Dumbea evacuation centre in Port Vila and saw for myself the impact on families. It is testimony to the serious work undertaken by the Government on disaster risk reduction and preparedness that all the families reached the centre before the cyclone hit, saving lives, as their entire settlement was destroyed. The head of one family told me that his heart is heavy: "We are not used to living in the city, all we want is to go back home and rebuild, but we have nothing left and we cannot do that without support."

I have been briefed by a UN assessment team that returned today from the islands of Ngona, Pele and Emau, three of the most remote northern islands. Water is a serious problem, with the contamination of water sources a grave health threat, particularly to children. Food stocks are limited as vegetable gardens have been wiped out - a concern for food security and as a source of livelihoods. Several of the health centres and schools have been severely damaged.

Despite the devastation, it is clear that preparedness measures taken by the Government, including the use of traditional building materials, community sensitization and well-drilled early warning systems helped reduce the impact of this disaster.

The Government has welcomed the support of the humanitarian community. UN agencies and NGOs are coordinating closely with the authorities. The United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) team has been providing technical assistance for assessments. All the clusters are operational and working well under the leadership of the respective Government line ministries, to provide food aid, shelter, water and sanitation, health, protection, education and recovery support to some 166,000 people affected by this disaster.

This is a very challenging logistical operation. Communication within and between the islands is a major challenge, while access to affected areas remains restricted because debris and fallen trees are blocking roads. It is also going to be very expensive due to the costs of getting to remote islands and the damage caused to transport infrastructure.

I thank all the partners for their generous support to the people of Vanuatu. Several countries have provided critical relief supplies, personnel, funding and logistics for the aid operation. We will issue a consolidated aid appeal early next week, once the assessments have been fully analyzed.

As we scale up the aid effort, and as basic services are being rehabilitated and people get back to work, we must ensure that no second emergency develops in Vanuatu from food and water shortages or disease outbreaks.

We must support the people and Government of Vanuatu as they continue to help the most vulnerable communities and start to recover and rebuild. The United Nations and our partners are ready to continue to help in this effort.

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