

JTB-DM/183

REPUBLIQUE DE VANUATU

REPUBLIC OF VANUATU

DIRECTION
DES SINISTRES NATURELS
SAC POSTAL PRIVÉ 036 - PORT VILA



NATURAL DISASTER
MANAGEMENT OFFICE
PRIVATE MAIL BAG 036 - PORT VILA

TEL. No. 23745/22252 - EXT. 37

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FACSIMILE MESSAGE:

TO: EMA/AIDAB - JOE BARR
DHA/SPPO - JOE CHUNG

TC PREMA - INTERIM REPORT
ASSESSMENT AND RELIEF OPERATIONS

ATTACHED REPORT FORWARDED FOR YOUR INFORMATION AND RETENTION.

REGARDS

IAN RECTOR
VANUATU
20 APRIL, 1993

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TROPICAL CYCLONE PREMA
DAMAGE ASSESSMENT/ DISASTER RELIEF OPERATIONS
INTERIM REPORT

1.0 Introduction

Tropical Cyclone Prema impacted the Shepherd, Southeast Epi and North Efate Islands of Vanuatu during the night of Monday 29 March and Tuesday 30 March, 1993., causing widespread destruction to buildings and crops.

Assessment and Relief operations by the National Disaster Committee (NDC) were threefold and centred on the following:

- * Damage assessment in and around the Capital Port Vila.
- * Damage assessment in North West and North Efate.
- * Damage assessment in the Shepherd Group to identify areas of severe, moderate and minor damage.

The assessment of damage within the Island of Efate commenced immediately (Afternoon 30 March, 1993), whilst the Shepherd and Epi assessments were commenced on the morning of the 31 March, 1993., following the arrival of the RVS Tukoro and a civilian helicopter.

The assessment was conducted by the VMF, and was co-ordinated by the Director, National Disaster Management Office who arrived in the helicopter and travelled extensively throughout the effected area.

By early afternoon 31 March, 1993., that is approximately 30 hours after initial Post Disaster Action had commenced, the NDC sent a report to the Prime Minister's office requesting that the area Southeast Epi, Shepherds and Northwest Efate be declared a disaster area, and that an official request for International assistance be made.

The Prime Minister conducted a Donor Country meeting on the morning of Friday 2nd April, 1993., and officially requested assistance in response to the devastation caused by TC Prema.

2.0 Assessment Procedure

Assessment was conducted in accordance with the National Disaster Planning arrangements, and was performed by ground teams from the VMF, supported by Rotary Wing aircraft.

Vanair aircraft which had been stationed in Santo prior to the Cyclones impact, were to be used to overfly the Islands enroute to Port Vila, however the NDC experienced difficulty in reaching Vanair management to approve the flight. Contact was made with the aircrew in Santo, and advice was received that they would conduct the fly over, however no information was relayed on their return.

The use of the VMF ground teams brought mixed success. There is a need to continue with the review of assessment procedures to ensure that future operations are completed with more speed and accuracy.

The pleasing factor in this operation was the rapid response by the Agriculture Department and Public Works Department in providing officers to accompany the assessment teams. This action resulted in the completion of the Reconstruction Report within eight days of the initial damage occurring, and also the determination of future food requirements and distribution of seed crops, within a similar period.

Responses by other Departments were in some cases slow, and in others very Ad Hoc as if there was little interest in what was happening. Considering the extensive pre cyclone season briefings that took place, this result was very disappointing.

The Disaster Management Workshop scheduled for late next month will be aimed specifically at these departments, and the NDC is confident that once Disaster Planning Arrangements, supported by internal plans and procedures have been finalised, then responses will become more formalised.

3.0 Donor Assistance

As always, responses by the Diplomatic Missions and International Agencies, NGO's, etc., were very prompt and indeed generous. As stated previously, the Formal request for International assistance was not made until the morning of Friday 2nd April, 1993.

As the majority of Missions attended daily NDC meetings, it was possible for them to be briefed on possible assistance requirements long before an official announcement was forthcoming. Approval was sought and received to officially request shelter and other items from Australia late on Wednesday (31 March, 1993), which arrived Friday afternoon, just hours after the official announcement.

The arrival of these supplies was followed by similar shelter items from New Zealand on Sunday (4 April, 1993), with a French Puma arriving late Monday afternoon (5 April, 1993).

The British Government provided VT4,500,00 towards the relief effort and arranged for the immediate purchase of 20,000 packets of vegetable seeds, which were available for distribution by Agriculture Officers from Saturday 3 April, 1993.

The importance of ensuring that each department establishes its needs, cannot be overshadowed by the desire of donor countries to provide assistance, unless of course there is some urgency or life threatening factor involved. Despite this, it behoves all departments to work efficiently to ensure that donor countries are provided with requests as soon as possible. Such requests should of course be channelled through the NDC.

4.0 South Pacific Disaster Relief Coordination

In January (1993), a Trilateral agreement was signed by the Governments of Australia, France and New Zealand which would see the coordination of relief assistance provided by these countries in response to disaster occurring in the Southwest Pacific.

Vanuatu's Disaster Management arrangements compliment this arrangement through the management of International assistance being coordinated through the NDC. Whilst the response of these three donors was prompt, the NDC was not aware as to how effective the new arrangements were, although it is known that considerable liaison took place between the Missions.

The NDC considers that for this arrangement to be totally effective, the three countries should appoint a chairman who would be then become an active member of the NDC, and coordinate the provision of relief as and when it is required or requested by the NDC. The position of chairman could then be rotated through the missions on an annual basis, or a period as determined by the major players. It may be that the coordinating committee in Vanuatu can be expanded to include all missions.

Under these arrangements, the relief would be viewed as being provided under the new coordinating arrangements. In days gone by it was viewed by authorities that a "competitive spirit" existed between Missions, and this ran the risk of one or more donors feeling as though they had been left with nothing to contribute.

In the relief efforts which followed TC Prema, the opinion of the NDC was that all three parties contributed well with the Australian supplies arriving with sufficient time for them to be registered and stored, before the New Zealand Andover came on task to deliver bulk supplies to the Islands. Both of these efforts were complimented by the arrival of the French Puma which was used to distribute stores to remote communities, and also to facilitate the speedy completion of the damage assessment by Structural Engineers.

Had the provision of these resources not been staggered, there would have been considerable down time of aircraft, and inefficiency within the management of the relief effort.

5.0 Distribution of Relief Supplies

The first of the shelter, agricultural, medical and other supplies was delivered over the weekend of 3/4 April, 1993. This was achieved firstly by VMF troops who drove around Efate, Secondly by the RVS Tukoro which visited all Islands in the Shepherd Group, and thirdly by Chiefs and Leaders from communities in and around Port Vila who collected supplies from the Operations Centre.

Additional supplies were delivered during the period 6-8 April, 1993., by the NZ Andover and French Puma.

The distribution process was well managed and supplies were delivered to all effected areas within seven days of the cyclones impact. There were the usual complaints from some sectors, and with the exception of Epi, these proved to be unsubstantiated. On Epi, the NDC found that relief supplies had not been distributed by officials in accordance with instructions, resulting in shelter and agriculture items being observed still stored in the Lamén Bay Airstrip Terminal seven days after being delivered by the Andover.

In addition to this, the NDC received a number of complaints that Chiefs and Leaders were not distributing supplies under the "Fair and Equal" proviso set by the NDC. These were investigated and action taken to right the issues at hand.

The distribution of disaster relief will always be a contentious issue, as the NDC is committed to issuing available supplies on a needs basis with those worst effected receiving assistance in the first instance. There are those however who feel that it is their divine right to receive assistance, regardless of the degree of impact, and will and usually do complain when it does not arrive.

Once policies have been approved by the Government, the NDC must be given the full support of Government to enable them to conduct the relief operation without undue interference. The Government must also have confidence that the NDC will operate under " a fair and equal" policy, and allow them to defend their actions against any complaints that suggest otherwise.

The action by the Ministry of Home Affairs midway through the relief operation was considered unfortunate and unnecessary, as it implied that the NDC were not acting correctly, which inturn may have jeopardised their good standing in the community.

The efforts by the National Disaster Management Office in developing plans and procedures have been recognised both Internationally and Regionally to the degree that Vanuatu is now regarded as the leading Southwest Pacific Nation as so far as Disaster Preparedness is concerned. To change such procedures mid way through an operation without foundation, will only deminish this standing and cause major donors to have doubts on the capabilities and credibility of our Disaster Management officers and arrangements.

6.0 Misleading Media Reports

The action taken by the Home Affairs Ministry was based on calls they received from some individuals, and on information they were hearing on the radio. The NDC were concerned that the Ministry should listen to the media instead of their own officials, and issued instructions to the media that information related to the cyclone should be verified by the NDC before it was broadcast.

7.0 Situation and Other Reports

This problem was compounded by the fact that the Minister had not sighted any of the situation reports which had been prepared and disseminated to a number of Ministries and Departments on a daily basis during the operation. In all a total of six situation reports, one resource deployment report and one operational strategic plan had been prepared, and it was of considerable concern that the Minister responsible for Disaster Matters had not sighted any of these documents despite them being hand delivered to his Ministerial Office.

8.0 Conclusion

There is an urgent need to continue the review of Policies and Procedures associated with damage assessment and distribution of relief supplies. The Disaster Management Workshop scheduled for May, 1993., will provide the opportunity for this to occur as will it allow for the review of the National Disaster Planning arrangements.

The rapid response by donors further supports the benefits of Missions and other Agencies attending NDC meetings. The appointment of a rotating chairman for the South Pacific Trilateral Agreement for the coordination of disaster relief, will ensure that all missions, and particularly those unable to attend NDC meetings, are aware of requests for assistance being made.

Immediate attention to the issues raised herein will ensure the continual review and development of Vanuatu's Disaster Management Arrangements and capabilities, and more importantly, more efficient and effective assistance to the citizens of Vanuatu who may be effected by such catastrophes.



Sato Kuman
Commissioner of Police
Chairman, National Disaster Committee
19 April, 1993.

END