



**16 March 2015 – As tropical Cyclone Pam ripped through the island nation Vanuatu, it not only caused major infrastructure damage, but also left around 60,000 children in urgent need of assistance. "We are particularly concerned about their health, nutrition, safety, schooling and recovery", said Isabelle Austin, [UNICEF Pacific](#) Deputy Representative. Meanwhile, Vanuatu's President Baldwin Lonsdale, who found himself stranded at the Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction, [blames climate change](#) for the increasingly unpredictable pattern of cyclonic activity in Vanuatu.**

Cyclone Pam, a category 5 storm, hit the island on Friday night and continued into the early hours of Saturday morning. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), winds are estimated to have reached 250km/h.

"It felt like the world was coming to an end," said UNICEF's Alice Clements, one of UNICEF's staff members who was in the capital, Port Vila, when the storm hit.

"The winds were incredibly strong, ripping off roofs, destroying homes and damaging hospitals and schools. Countless homes have been torn apart and communities have been left in ruins."

Access to safe drinking water and sanitation facilities has been disrupted in many places, leading to high risks of water-borne and vector-borne diseases. In addition, early childhood centres as well as primary and secondary schools have been damaged or are being used as evacuation centres. At least 70,000 school-aged children are missing out on education as a result.

### #WCDRR

Vanuatu's President Baldwin Lonsdale is currently stranded at the [United Nations World Conference on Disaster Reduction](#) in Sendai (Japan), along with some of the country's top disaster management officials.

"This [monster cyclone Pam](#) is the worst ever to hit our country. We are a resilient hard working people but this is a heavy burden to bear. It is a major setback to our plans for the development of our country. We will need assistance to meet the humanitarian needs of the people. Hundreds have lost their homes. Roads and bridges have been washed away. The airport is damaged. Schools and health facilities will have to be rehabilitated. It will be like starting over again in many ways."

According to Mr Lonsdale, the cyclone seasons that the nation had experienced were directly linked to [climate change](#), a message that was echoed by Mr [Anote Tong, President of Kiribati](#).

"It is time to act. Let us match the rhetoric of these international gatherings with pledges and commitments as leaders to do our best to improve conditions and lives of those who need it most", he said.

"For leaders of low-lying island atolls, the [hazards of global warming](#) affect our people in different ways, and it is a catastrophe that impinges on our rights and our survival into the future."

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