



**Press Statement: 18 March 2015**

## **Royal Commonwealth Society responds to the crisis in Vanuatu.**

The Royal Commonwealth Society has put out a call to its Branches and networks across the Commonwealth's 53 nation family to assist in any way they can with one of the worst disasters ever seen in the Pacific.

Cyclone Pam, a category five storm, with winds of up to 300km/h struck populated areas when it hit Vanuatu early on Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> March. The storm flattened many of the country's buildings. At least eight people are confirmed dead, but as the population is spread over 60 islands, the death toll is expected to be much higher. It's estimated the storm destroyed around 90% of the buildings across the archipelago.

President Baldwin Lonsdale said the storm has "wiped out" all development that the government had completed in recent years and everything would have to be rebuilt. Much of the island's housing has been flattened, schools and government buildings destroyed and other basic infrastructure damaged beyond repair.

The storm has also caused damage in New Zealand, Kiribati, Solomon Islands and Tuvalu.

The UN considers Vanuatu one of world's least developed countries. It has a GDP of \$828m (£560.7m).

Director of the Royal Commonwealth Society, Michael Lake, CBE says, "I think it is both appropriate and important that Commonwealth Countries stand behind each other at times of crisis. This is such an occasion and I hope our branches will feel able to help through fundraising activities."

Neighbouring Australia is providing life-saving humanitarian assistance including the deployment of an Urban Search and Rescue Team and a Medical Assistance Team. Its major financial and humanitarian assistance can be seen at <http://www.dfat.gov.au/news/news/Pages/assistance-to-vanuatu.aspx>

### **Notes to Editors**

The Royal Commonwealth Society is a network of individuals and organisations committed to improving the lives and prospects of Commonwealth citizens across the world.

Founded in 1868, the Society is constituted by Royal Charter (amended 2013) and as a charity.

The Society engages with its youth, civil society, business and governmental networks to address issues that matter to the citizens of the Commonwealth. Its primary focus is the promotion of young people throughout the Commonwealth.

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