



Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance

DISASTER CASE REPORT

Agency for
International
Development

Washington D.C.
20523

FIJI - Cyclone

Date: December 22-30, 1986

Location: Rotuma, northern Vanua Levu, Taveuni, and the Lau Group

No. Dead: 1

No. Affected: About 260,000 resided in affected areas; 3,000 evacuees

Damage: A preliminary estimate of damage to infrastructure, homes, crops, and livestock has been assessed at \$20,000,000.

The Disaster

After battering the island of Rotuma on December 22-24 and the French territory of Futuna on December 25-27, Cyclone Raja, the first storm of the season in the South Pacific, appeared headed for a direct hit on Fiji's main islands of Viti Levu and Vanua Levu. On December 29, however, just before midnight, the cyclone changed direction and began moving south-southeast, sparing Viti Levu but striking the eastern islands with destructive force. Heavy rains and winds up to 100 knots at the center caused extensive damage in northern Vanua Levu, Taveuni, and the Lau Group. Labasa reported the worst floods in living memory as a result of prolonged torrential rains. The severe flooding which resulted from the coincidence of the storm and extremely high tides was expected to create food shortages and health and sanitation problems. Although heavy crop and livestock losses were reported, and infrastructure (roads, bridges, jetties, and public utilities) was seriously affected, the damage to homes was less severe than in earlier cyclones. Commenting on this fact to the press, the Minister for Home Affairs noted that better constructed homes had replaced those destroyed by previous storms.

Action Taken by the Government of Fiji (GOF)

The GOF Weather Bureau tracked the cyclone throughout its course and mounted an effective early warning effort. Using real-time data provided by the AID/OFDA-funded satellite storm tracking station in Nadi, the Fiji Meteorological Service was able to broadcast frequent alerts as the storm approached. Public and private broadcasting companies cooperated to permit spot radio announcements.

The National Emergency Services Committee (EMSEC) mobilized on December 27 to begin damage assessments. The difficult task of assessing storm damage on the more remote islands was assisted by the New Zealand Air Force. Aerial surveys were conducted on January 1-2.

EMSEC held periodic briefings for the Chiefs of Missions and at the January 2 meeting announced that the GOF was willing to accept donor assistance to help alleviate the suffering of Raja's victims. A relief program was already underway, however. Forty-one emergency centers, with food distribution and other services, were opened for 3,000 evacuees in the Northern Division of Vanua Levu. Several vessels were dispatched to the outer islands on January 1 carrying food and other supplies to the affected inhabitants.

Assistance Provided by the United States Government

U.S. Ambassador C. Edward Dillery convened an embassy watch committee as Cyclone Raja approached and, with other Heads of Missions, attended EMSEC briefings throughout the emergency phase. After the January 2 briefing, when initial estimates indicated that relief assistance from outside sources would be needed, Ambassador Dillery exercised his disaster assistance authority to donate \$25,000 to the GOF. The funds were forwarded to the Ministry of Rural Development for the purchase of chain saws for distribution to families whose property had been destroyed or damaged; to the Ministry of Health for sanitation equipment; and to the Office of the Governor-General for agricultural tools and equipment.

In a radio interview on December 31, the Fiji Meteorology Service Director praised the satellite tracking system, funded earlier by a grant from AID/OFDA, and the technicians who interpreted the satellite imagery, stating that the system helped to save lives and prevent greater property loss than might otherwise have occurred.

TOTAL \$25,000

Assistance Provided by U.S. Voluntary Agencies

None reported

Assistance Provided by the International Community

Japan - provided \$50,000.

New Zealand - provided aircraft for aerial surveys.

UNDRO - donated \$20,000 for the local purchase of relief supplies.

TOTAL \$70,000