

Item 3.2

Support for Vanuatu

File No: S051491

Minute by the Lord Mayor

To Council:

The Islands of Vanuatu are now under a six-month state of emergency after Tropical Cyclone Judy, Tropical Cyclone Kevin and earthquakes struck the Pacific Island nation at the beginning of March.

On 1 March 2023, Tropical Cyclone Judy crossed the country, bringing heavy rain and gale-force winds, with the capital Port Vila bearing the greatest impacts. Within 48 hours this was followed by Cyclone Kevin and two earthquakes. The first earthquake, with a 6.5 magnitude struck at 5am 90km from Luganville, Vanuatu's second largest city, while the second with a 5.4 magnitude earthquake struck 90 minutes later 114km from the city.

The cyclones flooded roads, overturned light planes, uprooted trees, downed powerlines, disrupted communications and caused severe damage to infrastructure and crops. Homes were battered, with roofs being torn off while others were flattened.

Save the Children Australia are working with the Vanuatu National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) and other relevant authorities and humanitarian support partners to assess how many households require immediate assistance. They are providing first aid to individuals and families coordinating short term and long-term relief with regional communities.

The damage is on a similar scale to that caused by category 5 Cyclone Pam which hit Vanuatu in 2015 and caused widespread damage. While Vanuatu is prone to natural disasters, experiencing two cyclones close to each other is unprecedented. Climate change is increasing the intensity of these events.

On 2 March 2023, the Australian Government announced it would join over 100 other nations in co-sponsoring Vanuatu's bid for an International Court of Justice advisory opinion on climate change. The bid is part of an international campaign to ensure an adequate global response to the human rights crisis caused by climate change, with the people who have contributed the least to global emissions being impacted the most. The request will be made by a United Nations General Assembly resolution, to be voted on later this year. While non-binding, the advisory opinion will set out the right of people and states, particularly small islands states, to a safe climate.

While this move is welcomed, immediate assistance is needed. The Australian Government has deployed HMAS Canberra, with more than 600 Australian Defence Force personnel, to Vanuatu. This deployment was preceded by a 12-person rapid assessment team travelling on two Royal Australian Air Force aircraft. They will help Vanuatu with aerial damage assessments and a range of disaster, health, infrastructure, power and humanitarian assessment capabilities.

Australia's initial support package included shelters, water purification supplies and other essential items for impacted communities. The aid teams are working with partners from France and New Zealand to support Vanuatu's official response.

I am proposing that Council support these aid efforts with a donation of \$50,000 to Save the Children Australia.

These donations comply with the City of Sydney's Support for Charities Policy adopted by Council on 21 November 2022, and are in line with previous donations. They also align with objective 7.3.2 (2) of the City's Operational Plan 2022/23, which states that the City will support communities beyond our local area and international communities experiencing emergency situations.

Recommendation

It is resolved that:

- (A) Council donate \$50,000 to Save the Children Australia from the 2022/23 General Contingency Fund; and
- (B) the Chief Executive Officer be requested to arrange a program for staff donations to Save the Children Australia to support the relief effort in Vanuatu and for Council to match dollar for dollar any contributions until the end of March 2023 from the 2022/23 General Contingency Fund.

COUNCILLOR CLOVER MOORE

Lord Mayor