

Death toll from ferocious Fiji cyclone rises to 3

February 21 2016, by Nick Perry



A tree blocks a road after it was blown down by the encroaching cyclone Winston in Nakasi, Fiji, Saturday, Feb. 20, 2016. The Pacific island nation of Fiji is hunkering down as a formidable cyclone with winds of 300 kilometers (186 miles) per hour approaches. (Jonacani Lalakobau/Fiji Times via AP)

Officials in Fiji scrambled to assess damage Sunday in the wake of a ferocious cyclone that tore through the Pacific island chain, leaving at least three dead and collapsing hundreds of homes as people were sheltering from winds of up to 285 kilometers (177 miles) per hour.

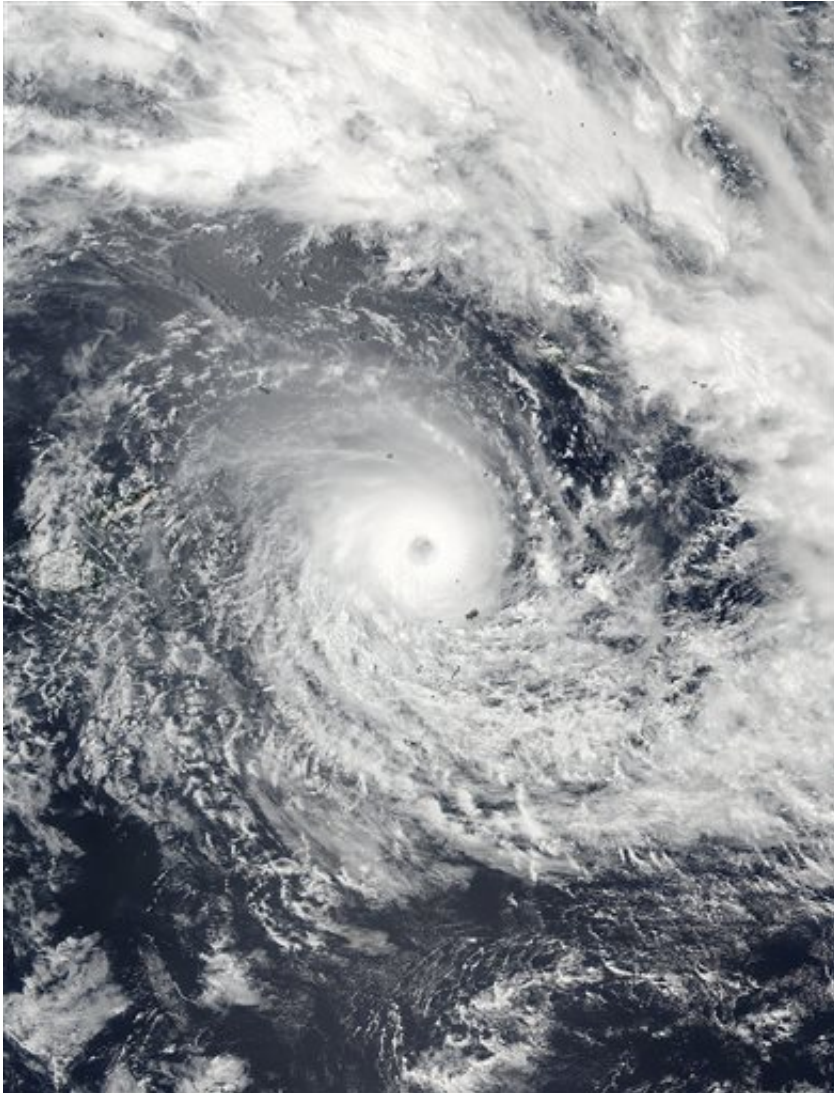
A curfew was extended through Sunday and police empowered to make arrests without a warrant to ensure order. The government was responding quickly by clearing vital roads and the main airport reopened Sunday.

George Dregaso from Fiji's National Disaster Management Office said two [people](#) on Ovalau Island died when the house they were sheltering in collapsed on them, and another man was killed on Koro Island, although it wasn't clear how. Police are investigating reports of two more deaths on the main island of Viti Levu, Dregaso said.

Officials were trying to establish communications and road access to the hardest-hit areas, and wouldn't know the full extent of the damage and injuries until then.

Cyclone Winston hit Fiji on Saturday and moved westward overnight along the northern coast of Viti Levu. Fiji's capital, Suva, located in the southern part of the island, was not directly in the cyclone's path and avoided the worst of its destructive power.

"Truth be told, we've gotten off pretty lightly here in the capital," said Alice Clements, a spokeswoman for UNICEF. "It was still a pretty awful night. You could hear crashing trees and power lines, and popping rivets as roofs got lifted and ripped out."



This Feb. 19, 2016, satellite image released by NASA Goddard Rapid Response shows Cyclone Winston in the South Pacific Ocean. The Pacific island nation of Fiji was hunkering down Saturday as a formidable cyclone with winds of 300 kilometers (186 miles) per hour bore down. (NASA Goddard Rapid Response/NOAA via AP)

She said there was foliage everywhere, which looks like it has been put through a blender.

Dregaso said one person on the west of Viti Levu had been hospitalized

after being hit by flying debris.

About 80 percent of the nation's 900,000 people were without regular power, although about one-third of them were able to get some power from generators, he said. Landlines throughout Fiji were down, but most mobile networks were working.



In this image made from video, residents board up windows as they prepare for the arrival of Cyclone Winston on Saturday, Feb. 20, 2016, in Nadi, Fiji. The Pacific island nation of Fiji was hunkering down Saturday as a formidable cyclone with winds of 300 kilometers (186 miles) per hour bore down. (TVNZ via AP Video)

Dregaso said there were 483 people who had evacuated from their homes and were staying in 32 emergency shelters. He said he expected the number of evacuees to rise.

Authorities were urging people to remain indoors as they cleared fallen trees and [power lines](#). They said all schools would be closed for a week to allow time for the cleanup. The government declared a 30-day state of natural disaster, giving extra powers to police to arrest people without a warrant.

Clements said there was concern for the people on the northern part of the main island and smaller islands elsewhere. She said many would have lost their homes and livelihoods, and some tourist resorts on the outer [islands](#) may have suffered damage.



In this image made from video, residents board up windows as they prepare for the arrival of Cyclone Winston on Saturday, Feb. 20, 2016, in Nadi, Fiji. The Pacific island nation of Fiji was hunkering down Saturday as a formidable cyclone with winds of 300 kilometers (186 miles) per hour bore down. (TVNZ via AP Video)

The airport reopened Sunday to allow emergency flights, Dregaso said, after many flights had been canceled the day before.

"As a nation, we are facing an ordeal of the most grievous kind," Prime Minister Voreqe Bainimarama wrote on social media. "We must stick together as a people and look after each other."

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