

CARIBBEAN: HURRICANE GEORGES

01 December
1998

appeal no. 29/98

situation report no 2.

period covered: 13 October- 01 December 1998

Relief and clean-up operations continue in the Caribbean after the onslaught by Hurricane Georges in late September which left more than 500 people dead and some 600,000 temporarily homeless; currently more than 100,000 are still estimated to be in shelters, most with their homes destroyed. National Societies in Cuba, Dominican Republic, Haiti and the Eastern Caribbean islands of Antigua and St. Kitts are being supported in relief and rehabilitation operations by the International Federation, which launched an Appeal on 2 October for CHF 10,221,000.

The context

Plans of action are being implemented in all five of the Caribbean countries (Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and the Eastern Caribbean islands of Antigua and St. Kitts) where the International Federation is supporting the National Societies relief operations in response to Hurricane Georges. In order to provide support to the National Societies of the affected countries, the International Federation launched an Appeal on 2 October for CHF 10,221,000 to assist 272,500 beneficiaries for six months, including the rehabilitation of 14,500 homes. The emergency phase is continuing in Hispaniola, the island shared by Dominican Republic and Haiti which bore the brunt of the storm, with much of the local agriculture crop destroyed and food shortages expected for more than one year. Rehabilitation efforts have begun in Antigua, St. Kitts, and Cuba, and are expected to continue over the next four months. Delegates from the National Societies of Britain, Belgium, Columbia, Cuba, Germany, Mexico, the Netherlands, Spain and the United States have augmented the Federation's presence in the region to 13 delegates during the emergency response phase. Additional American Red Cross delegates will be deployed as long-term feeding programmes begin in Dominican Republic.

Integrated into all the relief and rehabilitation activities is strengthening the local capacity of the Red Cross and the community to better prepare for and improve their response to further emergencies. Capacity building elements include disaster preparedness education, retro-fitting of homes and public structures, and strengthening the image of the Red Cross.

Latest events

Over 100,000 people are estimated to still be living in shelters or boarding with relatives and friends throughout the region. It is believed that most of these people have lost their homes and will remain in temporary shelters until permanent accommodations can be identified. Shortages of food, sanitation and hygiene materials continue to be of major concern, especially in the Dominican Republic and Haiti which were hit hardest by the storm. Some communities in the Dominican Republic were so devastated

by Georges that the government will have to relocate all the residents. In Cuba and the Eastern Caribbean islands of St. Kitts and Antigua, shelters are closed and the rehabilitation phase has begun.

Baseball hero and Dominican Republic native Sammy Sosa has teamed up with the Red Cross to support the Dominican relief operations. Through the Sammy Sosa Foundation, the Red Cross has received more than 50,000 pounds of foodstuff and a 40-foot container of building supplies. Over the next two weeks an additional 150,000 pounds of foodstuff, medicines, and clothing is expected.

Since Hurricane Georges struck in September, the Caribbean Red Cross Societies' website (www.caribredcross.org) has received more than 375,000 hits and processed over 350 Red Cross HelpGrams, with individuals around the world pledging their support on-line to the Red Cross; most of these have been referred to their respective National Society.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

Cuba

The co-ordinator of the International Federation's Hurricane Georges regional relief effort returned from Cuba where he assessed the on-going relief activities of the National Society and helped finalise the operation's action plan. An estimated 147,000 Cuban citizens were severely affected by the hurricane, with the Red Cross providing shelter to more than 92,000 and distributing food, hygiene kits, and other relief material in support. The situation in the country is improving rapidly and the Red Cross has moved from the emergency phase into rehabilitation. The Cuban Red Cross has identified 1,000 families in the eastern provinces of Guantanamo, Holguin and Santiago de Cuba to support the rehabilitation of their homes in December by providing them with locally manufactured roofing material. This area was highly impacted by hurricane related flooding and prior to the storm was already suffering from a severe drought.

A capacity building element is also planned, and will use this operation as a practical vehicle to strengthen the Cuban Red Cross disaster preparedness activities and improve their radio communications network.

Dominican Republic

While basic utilities have been restored in most areas in the Dominican Republic, the situation remains acute for the estimated 80,000 still living in shelters and for the poor rural farm workers who continue to be at risk to food shortages, contaminated water, and diseases and infections. With 80 percent of the local agriculture crop destroyed, including most of the banana crop which is part of the staple diet of the poorest Dominicans, it is feared that more than 150,000 people will continue to be at risk of food shortages for the next 12 months. Outbreaks of skin and eye infections and cases of diarrhoea are common in the shelters. While reports of the potentially fatal mosquito-carried dengue virus have been less than expected, this still poses a dangerous threat across the country.

For the Red Cross, the emergency phase of the relief operation continues. Since the start of the disaster, more than 3,350 Red Cross volunteers have been mobilised and are active in all regions of the country. Basic medicines are being provided through Red Cross first aid/health posts. A series of Red Cross safe hygiene posters have been distributed to shelters showing how to deal with water and garbage. To date, the Red Cross has distributed more than 650 metric tons of food, medicines, clothing, and plastic roofing material to 130,000 disaster victims. With support of the American Red Cross, 720 pails of hypochlorite was provided to the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) to continue their water purification effort across the country.

Six regional warehouses are in operation, including a large (300 mts²) central warehouse constructed on the Red Cross headquarters compound. An additional five warehouses are being identified. ECHO funded distribution of locally purchased food, personal hygiene kits, and cooking sets for 13,000 of the most vulnerable families begins this week and will continue for the next three months. Three international and local Red Cross relief delegates are posted across the country and co-ordinating distributions with local branches out of three regional centres in La Romana (east), Santo Domingo (central) and Barharona (west). The American Red Cross, in co-ordination with the Dominican Republic Red Cross and the International Federation, is scheduled to begin a long-term food aid programme in January, distributing more than 12,000 metric tons of foodstuff to 169,000 people over a 12-month period. This USD 7.8 million programme is funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). While needs in the country are still severe and are anticipated to be long-term in nature, the Regional Delegation has made arrangements with international donors to redirect a number of in-kind contributions previously earmarked for the Dominican Republic to other Central American countries following the devastation caused by Hurricane Mitch.

The Red Cross has already begun co-ordinating rehabilitation efforts in affected communities, distributing the contents of a 40-foot container of donated building supplies and providing plastic sheeting for nearly 8,000 homes. In February, the International Federation and the Dominican Republic Red Cross will begin the formal rehabilitation phase of the operation with plans to assist 10,000 families repair or build their homes. This effort, in combination with the government's and other relief agencies rehabilitation plans, will address the permanent housing needs of the country and relocate the more than 20,000 displaced families currently living in temporary shelters or with family members. The International Federation has presented a proposal to the British Red Cross for British Government funding of 50 hurricane-proof homes.

Haiti

The International Federation's relief co-ordinator in Haiti and the Haitian Red Cross are working closely with other international organisations and local NGOs in co-ordinating the relief effort. Much of the food aid is being co-ordinated by other organisations, with the Red Cross responsible for reducing infections and safeguarding the health of some 10,000 families by providing them with personal hygiene kits. The lack of proper hygiene prior to the disaster had placed a large portion of the population at risk; this has been magnified by Hurricane Georges with the resulting loss of homes and personal effects in the floods and the price gouging of basic hygienic items like soap, toothpaste and toilet paper.

The Haitian Red Cross is also distributing international in-kind donations through its branches and with the International Federation is developing a strategy for rehabilitation.

Eastern Caribbean (Antigua and St. Kitts)

In the Eastern Caribbean islands of Antigua and St. Kitts, families are now all out of emergency shelters and have either returned to their homes or are living with relatives or friends. Stores are fully stocked and infrastructure repairs are nearing completion with access to basic food and personal hygiene items again available to local residents. The Antigua & Barbuda Red Cross last week received a 20 foot container of food supplies from the Trinidad & Tobago Red Cross to continue support to families affected by the storm. Most of this contribution was forwarded to neighbouring St. Kitts.

For the Red Cross, the emergency phase has ended and support in the rehabilitation of homes on both islands has begun. In Antigua, the Red Cross is supporting people in repairing their homes with the provision of zinc roofing sheets and tools to carry out repairs. In St. Kitts where 80 percent of all homes were damaged by the storm, the International Federation, with co-ordination support from the American Red Cross, is in discussions with the World Bank regarding funding support to build 200 homes.

Outstanding needs

The main outstanding need continues to be cash contributions to ensure that the emergency and rehabilitation needs are met, as outlined in the Appeal. This is especially urgent for the Dominican Republic and Haiti which will soon face severe food shortages and require assistance to rehabilitate homes damaged or destroyed by the hurricane.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

Conclusion

Continued financial support is needed in order to address the relief, hygiene, and rehabilitation needs resulting from the widespread devastation left by Hurricane Georges. The International Federation has been active in the region throughout the crisis, and has been working closely with the National Societies of the affected countries to assist the most vulnerable victims of this natural disaster.

Peter Rees-Gildea
Director
Operations Funding and
Reporting Department

Santiago Gil
Director
Americas Department