

## ***CARIBBEAN: HURRICANE KEITH***

*2 October 2000*

### ***Information Bulletin N° 1***

#### ***The Disaster***

In the north-western Caribbean, Tropical Storm Keith developed in a matter of hours between Friday 29 and Saturday 30 September into a very dangerous category 4 hurricane with sustained winds reaching 135 miles (215 km) per hour. Over the last 36 hours, the centre of Hurricane Keith has been nearly stationary some 40 miles (60 km) just off the northern coast of Belize, 95 km south-southeast of Chetumal, Mexico, with winds of 185 km per hour and heavy rains battering the northern part of the country as well as the Mexican Yucatán peninsula. Hurricane warnings remain in effect for the east of the Yucatan Peninsula and Belize from Cabo Catoche to Monkey River Town, and a hurricane watch has been established for the north coast of Yucatan from Cabo Catoche to Progreso. Hurricane Keith is expected to move slowly towards the northwest on Monday 2 October.

The hurricane has developed rapidly, but is moving slowly, causing heavy and prolonged rains over Belize, the Yucatan Peninsula, Honduras, Guatemala and Nicaragua, with a high risk of life-threatening flash floods and mud slides in these countries. Along the coasts of Belize and the Yucatan peninsula, storm surge flooding of 9 to 12 feet above normal tide levels with large battering waves are expected.

The stationary character of the hurricane during the last 36 hours has made a co-ordinated assessment of the situation impossible for the Belize government's National Emergency Management Organisation (NEMO), of which the Belize Red Cross is a member. However, the government has called an emergency meeting of NEMO on 2 October. Unconfirmed reports indicate that, although the population along the coast has been evacuated to higher ground inland, the rapid development of the hurricane prevented evacuation of the population and of tourists from the many cays along the coast. While the entire population of approximately 10,000 people were evacuated from the mainland city of Corozal to the shelters in Orange Walk, there is grave concern for the fate of around 4,000 people on the San Pedro Amber Gris Cay, and of other populations on the many other cays along the coast, where shelters already are full and local hotels have fitted out their empty rooms as emergency shelters.

In Belize City and its environs which has a population of around 50,000 people, reports indicate that at least 20 houses were damaged on Sunday 1 October, causing serious injuries to several people, and many other houses are suffering from roof damage. On the same day, NEMO ordered general evacuation of the city and of other towns along the coast. The main reception centre of people from the Belize City area, is the country's capital city, Belmopan, where shelters have been opened and distributions of relief items taken place.

Unsanitary conditions are developing as a result of the flooding caused by heavy rains and the storm surge along the coast, given the use of pit latrines in heavily populated areas. There is further concern that serious flooding may occur in Belize City and Belmopan should rains continue.

The Santo Domingo Regional Delegation continues to monitor Tropical Depression Joyce and is in contact with all the National Societies in the Eastern Caribbean, including the overseas branches. All the National Societies are on alert status.

## ***Red Cross/Red Crescent Action***

The Santo Domingo Regional Delegation and the Guatemala Regional Delegation, in co-ordination with the Belize Red Cross and the Mexican Red Cross as well as the American Red Cross, have been on the alert over the weekend, following the track of Hurricane Keith. Both Regional Delegations are in regular contact with the Belize Red Cross and are ready to provide support. The Regional Intervention Team co-ordinated by the Guatemala Regional Delegation has ensured that a group of experienced Red Cross relief personnel from several Latin-American National Societies, are on standby to give technical assistance to the Belize Red Cross.

### ***The Belize Red Cross***

The National Red Cross Society has been on the alert with both volunteers and staff working around the clock since Saturday 30 September. Communications with local Red Cross branches are being maintained by radio and the Society has distributed food to the evacuated population in shelters. Needs assessments, which could not be carried out on 30 September or 1 October, will take place in co-ordination with NEMO as soon as weather conditions permit.

Relief supplies were received by the Belize Red Cross within the framework of the Federation's Regional Disaster Preparedness Programme container project funded by the Japanese Red Cross (plastic sheeting, kitchen sets, water purification tablets, cots and flashlights) and dispatched to the Corrazal and Punta Gorda provinces in view of the impending disaster.

In the northern parts of the country, which probably are the most seriously affected by the hurricane, the Belize Red Cross counts on the active participation of more than one hundred trained volunteers and expects that many more will join, should there be a need for more relief work.

### ***The Mexican Red Cross***

The Mexican Red Cross has activated its relief teams with 60 volunteers that are currently located in the cities of Chetumal, Cancun, Isla Mujeres, Cozumel and Playa del Carmen. Two trucks loaded with food, water and hygiene supplies will leave the Red Cross warehouse in Toluca to assure prompt support.

## *Needs*

Based on previous experience (1996 to 1998), estimated needs will be cash, plastic sheeting, emergency food supplies and water sanitation equipment. To date, the almost stationary nature of Hurricane Keith has made damage and situation assessments impossible, therefore neither the government nor the Belize Red Cross has not made a request for international assistance. Nevertheless, in view of the gravity of the situation, the Secretariat, upon the request of the Santo Domingo Regional Delegation, has released CHF 120,000 from the Disaster Relief Emergency fund (DREF).

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