

Information bulletin



International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

Haiti: Tropical Storm Tomas

Information bulletin n° 1
GLIDE n° TC-2010-000216-HTI
12 November 2010

This bulletin is being issued for information only, and reflects the current situation and details available at this time. The Haitian Red Cross Society (HRCS), with the support of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), has determined that external assistance is not required, and is therefore not seeking funding or other assistance from donors at this time.

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Children in a camp in Port-au-Prince carefully read the Red Cross prevention messages before the arrival of Tomas. Source: Sophie Chavanel / Canadian Red Cross.

Tropical Storm Tomas brought heavy rain to the south-western region of Haiti as of the night of 4 November 2010 and intermittent rains were experienced throughout the country. Nevertheless, the impact of the storm was less severe than initially expected.

The Haitian Red Cross Society and the IFRC team in country activated its preparedness mechanism prior to the storm to respond to any possible effects. Five Emergency Response Teams composed of Haitian Red Cross Society, Partner National Societies and IFRC staff were alerted and mobilized to conduct rapid assessments following the rains. Based on the initial assessments, additional relief distributions of emergency shelter and non-food items have begun around the country to several hundred families.

The Situation

From 30 to 31 October 2010, Hurricane Tomas struck the Lesser Antilles, then weakening to become a tropical storm, which brought heavy rainfall to Haiti from the night of 4 November to the morning of 6 November. The storm passed a few miles west of the southern and northern Haitian peninsula. The southern coast of Haiti experienced a moderate storm surge and intermittent rains were experienced country-wide. The most affected regions were Grande Anse, Nippes and Artibonite. Grand Saline and part of Gonaives experienced most flooding, however, although most river levels rose significantly, no major flooding affecting large areas was recorded. Classes were cancelled while the storm passed over the country.

Roads were interrupted due to flooding and landslides were experienced all over the country making transport difficult during the first 48 hours after the storm. Loss of crops was also experienced, especially in the south where many coffee plantations were due for harvest in a week. A major concern is that the increased river levels and flooded areas pose a risk in the context of the cholera outbreak, as stagnant flood waters can propagate the disease. Nonetheless, the effects of Tropical Storm Tomas over Haiti were less severe than initially forecasted.

Red Cross and Red Crescent action

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement supported the response efforts of the Haitian Red Cross Society to Hurricane Tomas. Preparations for the storm were in progress at same time as the cholera outbreak interventions were taking place. A first Red Cross cholera treatment centre (CTC) was established in Arcahaie, just north of Port-au-Prince. As Hurricane Tomas approached, there were concerns that the outbreak of cholera may be worsened by the expected torrential rains and appropriate preparedness measures were taken before the storm reached the country.

Since Monday 1 November, the IFRC communications team transmitted SMS messages to the population for storm preparedness until the passage of the Tropical Storm. Emergency Response Teams were on standby for deployment: 5 teams for Port-au-Prince and the north area, 1 team in Jacmel, 1 in Léogane and 1 in Petit Goave. In order to address possible needs after the passage of the storm, sufficient stocks of non-food items were made available to support the National Society. Relief supplies were mobilized via sea freight from the Regional Logistics Unit (RLU) in Panama and relief supplies prepositioned in the country were reorganized and moved to areas at risk.

Moreover, additional human resources were placed on standby to provide support as requested. For example, a logistics ERU with two staff was deployed to Haiti through PADRU and a FACT team was put on alert. After the passage of the storm, it was determined that support from the FACT team was not necessary.

The IFRC base camp activated its hurricane response plan. All staff were moved to safe sleeping quarters in the main building. The main building was reinforced with plywood and all tents in the camp area were taken down and packed safely.

On 4 November 2010, the HRCS mobilized its volunteers to communities in flood prone areas in Les Cayes. Volunteers visited people living near riverbanks and high-risk areas within the city and assisted in evacuating families to friends and relatives living in safer areas (still within Les Cayes). The National Society was ready to respond with relief supplies prepositioned by the IFRC.

Coordination: The IFRC Pan American Disaster Response Unit (PADRU) and the Haiti support team in Panama were in constant contact with the IFRC team in Haiti.



A view of Cul-de-sac Valley taken from Morne Fortune shows the damage caused by Tomas. Source: IFRC

The Haitian Red Cross Society maintained constant coordination with the Department for Civil Protection (DPC) to prioritize preparedness interventions as Tropical Storm Tomas approached. Before the storm, the Disaster Risk

Management department of the Haitian Red Cross Society activated its 13 regional branches. Presidents and regional disaster risk reduction focal points from the Disaster Preparedness/Disaster Risk Reduction (DP/DRR) Surge Project coordinated with local branches to disseminate information on the evolving situation and risks at regional and local levels in particular in the South and West departments most at risk of storm surge water levels, flooding and landslides.

People living in at risk areas in the South and West departments and vulnerable families living in IDP camps following the earthquake received government warnings and advice through the HRCS staff and volunteers prior to the storm. The HRCS put in place an information management and coordination cell located at its headquarters in Port-au-Prince, monitoring in real time the events that unfolded.

Rapid disaster preparedness interventions in camps: Rapid disaster preparedness interventions at camp level have been ongoing since the beginning of September. In coordination with the International Organization for Migration, the DPC and the Camp Coordination and Camp Management Cluster, 36 UNOPS volunteers and 20 HRCS volunteers specialized in health, hygiene and emergency first aid from the water and sanitation team, have conducted trainings with over 14,000 IDP families from 86 camps identified as most at risk to flooding and landslides in Port-au-Prince.

To fulfil demands for information and to ensure that messages were disseminated as widely as possible, training was provided to over 30 non-governmental organizations, camp management agencies and government agencies interested in working in disaster preparedness. These 'rapid' half-day interventions focused on the transmission of potentially life-saving messages, covering core topics on risk identification and risk mapping, information, alerts and evacuation, as well as shelter management, family safety and emergency health and hygiene promotion. The interventions were designed to complement longer-term ongoing and planned disaster risk reduction programmes implemented by the Haitian Red Cross Society, the IFRC and Partner National Societies (PNS). At the request of the DPC, the campaign was also extended to Petit-Goave, Léogane and Jacmel providing direct training to camp members. A training of trainers was also organized for partner organizations.

DP/DRR pre-positioned stock: As part of the disaster preparedness plan for the 2010 hurricane season under the DP/DRR Surge Project, family emergency kits and shelter kits for 25,000 families were requisitioned in March 2010. Each family kit contains 2 mosquito nets, 2 jerry cans, 5 blankets, 1 water bucket, 1 kitchen set, 1 hygiene kit and 2 tarpaulins. Each shelter kit includes rope, a handsaw, nails, a shovel, a handle, a hoe, shears, tie wire, a claw hammer, polypropylene bags.

In addition, stock for 17,000 families were pre-positioned in-country, whilst an additional stock for 8,000 families was pre-positioned at the IFRC RLU based in Panama. The in-country stock was pre-positioned at ten regional branches: Cap-Haïtien, Hinche, Saint-Marc, Jacmel, Les Cayes, Port-de-Paix, Jérémie, Anse-à-Veau, Gonaïves and Léogane, and as well as at metropolitan level in Port-au-Prince. Pre-positioned stock in the earthquake-affected areas included stock for 1,500 families in Jacmel (including stock for 500 families from the Canadian Red Cross) and stock for 500 families in Léogane. In preparation for Tomas' passage, additional stock for 500 families in Les Cayes and 500 families in Jérémie was sent during the week of 1 November to supplement existing stock. The pre-positioned stock stored in Panama was sent to Port-au-Prince to respond to the storm.

The stock pre-positioned before Tomas was available to cover numbers of potentially affected families as follows:

- 250 families in Anse-à-Veau
- 250 families in Gonaïves
- 1,500 families in Jacmel (including provision for 500 families with Canadian Red Cross stocks)
- 500 families in Léogane
- 500 families in Les Cayes
- 500 families in Port-de-Paix
- 500 families in Jérémie

In preparation for the 2010 hurricane season and beyond, the DP/DRR team developed an Emergency Response Strategy to support the HRCS disaster management capacity, building on different levels of response according to identified needs and the in-country capacity of the Movement.

Emergency response teams: Before the storm, the HRCS alerted its regional branches and National Intervention Team members at the national and regional level to prepare and activate response mechanisms at the local level.

To support HRCS' response teams, the IFRC established Emergency Response Teams (ERTs) composed of HRCS, IFRC and PNS staff who have been on standby since the beginning of September 2010. After receiving training on damage and needs assessment, the ERTs have been deployed on one occasion to respond to severe rains that occurred on 24 September, followed by an additional deployment of the Léogane ERT led by the Spanish Red Cross during the month of October to respond to heavy rains. Most recently, the ERTs specializing in health and water and sanitation were put on standby for deployment to Artibonite as of 23 October. One of these ERTs composed of American Red Cross members was deployed to Saint-Marc to support field coordination of the cholera response interventions.

Even though the hurricane season is coming to a close, ERTs have remained on call, with eight teams established and briefed for deployment in response to Hurricane Tomas. Five teams covered Port-au-Prince and the north, composed of two HRCS teams, one American Red Cross team, and two IFRC teams. Additionally, a team is present in Jacmel, Léogane and Petit Goave composed of Canadian Red Cross, Spanish Red Cross and Norwegian Red Cross staff members. When possible, HRCS volunteers and staff are members of each team. On 5 November, the five ERTs were deployed to sites in Port-au-Prince:

- Team 1 – La Saline
- Team 2 - Caradeaux Lycee
- Team 3 - Bon Repot
- Team 4 - Tabarre – Ecole Nacional
- Team 5 - Lycee Firmin / Rue Marseillane / Saint Therese

All HRCS regional branches, except the Centre department, mobilized assessment teams in coordination with the local authorities. The HRCS also assisted families who were moved to collective centres and provided first aid and support as needed.

In response to the needs assessed by the ERTs deployed, the HRCS distributed 90 mosquito nets, 40 blankets, and 40 sleeping mats in Tabarre on 6 November. The National Society also distributed 270 kitchen sets, 540 blankets, 150 jerry cans and 40 tarpaulins in Jérémie. In addition, 250 tarpaulins were distributed on 8 November in the Golf course camp in Port-au-Prince.

The IFRC team in Léogane together with the PNS present in this region also deployed one ERT which carried out needs assessments. In line with findings, relief distributions will take place in the coming days by the Haitian Red Cross Society.

How we work

All International Federation assistance seeks to adhere to the [Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations \(NGO's\) in Disaster Relief](#) and the [Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response \(Sphere\)](#) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable.

The International Federation's vision is to inspire, encourage, facilitate and promote at all times all forms of humanitarian activities by National Societies, with a view to preventing and alleviating human suffering, and thereby contributing to the maintenance and promotion of human dignity and peace in the world.

The International Federation's work is guided by [Strategy 2020](#) which puts forward three strategic aims:

1. Save lives, protect livelihoods, and strengthen recovery from disaster and crises.
2. Enable healthy and safe living.
3. Promote social inclusion and a culture of non-violence and peace.

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