

CARIBBEAN: HURRICANE GEORGES

**appeal no: 29/98
(Preliminary Appeal)
23 September 1998**

***THIS PRELIMINARY APPEAL SEEKS
CHF 2,400,000
IN CASH, KIND AND SERVICES***

Summary

Hurricane *Georges* continued its deadly rampage through densely populated islands of the Caribbean as it crossed the island of Hispaniola last night, impacting the capital of the Dominican Republic, Santo Domingo, with winds of 110-120 mph. Despite a lessening of its wind speed as it moved across land, there were growing fears of its likely impact on Haiti, the most impoverished country in the Americas. Region-wide, the reported death toll had risen to 20 by last night but this number is likely to increase if *Georges* continues on its forecast path through Haiti and across warm, open water into the easternmost provinces of Cuba.

National Red Cross Societies throughout the region are engaged in a wide variety of disaster response activities including issuing warnings, media alerts, organising evacuations, carrying out damage and needs assessments, feeding the homeless, distributing emergency relief and handling tracing inquiries. The International Federation is sending three relief and logistics delegates to support National Society efforts throughout the region.

The immediate needs are for further damage and needs assessment in the Dominican Republic and Haiti, first aid and emergency feeding in the shelters, plastic sheeting for homes which have lost their roofs, and water purification tablets. In the Eastern Caribbean, Red Cross estimates indicate a considerable need for rehabilitation materials particularly zinc sheets and timber for house repairs; food and drinking water are also needed.

The Disaster

Early reports from the Dominican Republic indicate that at least 12 people have died. This toll could rise as initial forecasts had expected *Georges* to impact the island on the north coast before it took

its deadly turn towards the capital, Santo Domingo (population 3 million), yesterday. Extensive damage is reported from the resort towns on the east coast. The eye of the storm passed just north of Santo Domingo bringing with it heavy rains and severe winds. Many homes have lost their roofs. Trees and power lines are down across the island. Residents around the Haina River were instructed to evacuate and an overnight curfew was declared.

Darkness had fallen on Haiti as the storm crossed Hispaniola. There were reports of cars streaming out of the capital, Port-au-Prince, as the population belatedly grasped the possible seriousness of the situation.

The National Hurricane Centre reported some hours ago that it was having difficulty locating the centre of the hurricane as it passed over the mountains of Hispaniola, peaks nearly 10,000 feet high, which disrupted the system somewhat. Aerial reconnaissance will not be able to pick out the centre again until its expected emergence back over open water later today. It was not clear whether the centre would emerge on the west or the north coast of Haiti.

The initial damage assessment has been undertaken by the Red Cross in Antigua and Barbuda. It confirms the earlier reported death of two persons; five persons are seriously injured. Some 1,650 houses are severely damaged or destroyed, leaving more than 2,000 persons homeless. It is estimated that 15% of the corporate buildings are badly damaged. At least 50% of the telephone lines in Antigua are down. Roads are blocked which makes transport difficult; electricity and water supplies are severely disrupted, and it is estimated that it will take two weeks to restore them.

No reports have yet been received from the Island of Barbuda. However, it is feared that water might be the priority need for Barbuda as the water source is mainly collected rain water which has now been contaminated by sea water.

The situation in St. Kitts is still confused as most of the phone lines are out of order. The airport tower has been damaged, which complicates the relief operation in St. Kitts. *Georges* caused the worst effects of a hurricane in living memory with five persons reported dead and several persons with major or minor injuries. The hospital is also badly damaged.

Some 1800 houses (or 80% of the those assessed) in St. Kitts have lost their roof while more than 30 houses were completely destroyed. Roads are blocked, the water system is down, but repairs are expected to restore some limited capacity later today. Fortunately, the population of St. Kitts has the support of a British marine contingent.

Mudflows on Montserrat in the wake of *Georges* have not impacted any populated areas. Preliminary estimates indicate that Anguilla and Dominica were mildly affected

The Islands of Saba and St. Eustatius in the Netherlands Antilles were in the core of hurricane *Georges* which had at that time winds of 140 mph. and are considerably damaged. Communication and electricity lines are down. Damage to houses is extensive. It has been reported that Saba is in particular need of assistance. The roofs on the hospital and the elderly home were blown off. The expectation is that the hospital is damaged beyond repair. However, no death or severe injuries were reported due to evacuation of the most serious hospital cases. St. Maarten has been less affected by *Georges* than during Hurricane *Luis* (1995) but damage is considerable to roofs on houses.

The Response so far

Government Action •

In the Dominican Republic, the government declared an overnight curfew and put all emergency services on alert. Shelters were opened and many schools and churches were occupied overnight. The President of the Republic, Dr. Leonel Fernandez, met yesterday with the International Federation's

Acting Head of Regional Delegation, Mr. Eduardo Romero, and the Director General of the Dominican Republic Red Cross, Dr. Angel Almanzar, to brief him prior to his address to the nation.

In Haiti, there was a delayed response on the part of the public authorities to the imminent threat. At the time of writing, the Federation office in Port-au-Prince (3 a.m. local time), reported heavy rain and strong winds.

The Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency (Inter-Governmental Organisation) held a donors' meeting in Barbados yesterday and has plans to fly over the stricken areas.

Red Cross Action •

CHF 100,000 which has been released from the DREF.

Prior to the storm's arrival, the Dominican Republic Red Cross dispatched advance teams to San Pedro de Macoris in the east and Cibao in the centre and damage assessments are set to get underway early this morning (local time). The Red Cross activated their volunteers in the branches to provide medical assistance in the shelters operated by the government (population count not yet available). Most schools and suitable government buildings were open to the public.

The Haitian Red Cross has been in radio contact with all its local branches who have been informing the surrounding communities about precautions to take. Red Cross volunteers are on stand-by to carry out the initial needs assessment once the hurricane has passed. In Haiti, the Federation office issued alert bulletins to all the media on Monday in the absence of any declared state of emergency. It was distributed to four main radio stations and the country's leading newspaper, *Nouvelliste*.

The Red Cross on Antigua operated 13 shelters for 6,500 people during the passing of the hurricane, including persons from Dominican Republic and Montserrat. Food and cots have been distributed to those in need. It seems likely that some 1,650 persons will remain in the shelters for some time as their houses are uninhabitable.

The Red Cross of St. Kitts is operating six shelters with at least 20 residents each. As in Nevis, the condition of the shelters is so bad that the Red Cross building and even the police station had to be used temporarily. The Red Cross building has suffered damage and temporary residents have been moved elsewhere as repairs are needed to the warehouse section in order to start distributing stocks of 400 galvanised sheets on Thursday. The Red Cross in Nevis is also engaged in shelter management and has distributed some food. Reports from Nevis are incomplete as yet.

Co-ordination •

The Regional Delegation in Santo Domingo was temporarily forced to evacuate its office yesterday but is functioning normally today. The Regional Delegation is co-ordinating actions with governments and National Societies throughout the region, maintaining close links with Haiti and Cuba in particular. The Federation office in Port-au-Prince is in regular contact with the Haitian Red Cross. The Regional Delegation's Disaster Preparedness Unit, based in Kingston, is playing a key role in information gathering in the Eastern Caribbean. A Federation delegate is now in the Eastern Caribbean assisting with needs assessment and the development of a plan of action.

The Antigua and Barbuda Red Cross can operate in these severe conditions due to a temporary move to another location with functional phone lines, an emergency generator and a HF radio. The Red Cross Societies in St. Lucia and Dominica are handling much of the radio contacts in the Eastern Caribbean.

The Intended Operation

Assessment of Needs •

The Dominican Republic Red Cross' priorities be providing medical assistance and ensuring safe sanitation conditions in the shelters as well as supporting the feeding programme across the country. Following the completion of the initial assessment, the Red Cross will finalise the relief distribution and recovery strategy for the country which will focus on emergency medical response, feeding for the homeless, sanitation and rehabilitation. Similar needs are likely to emerge in Haiti.

In the East Caribbean, needs as currently assessed include plastic sheeting, food, drinking water, water purification tablets, galvanised sheets, plywood, nails carpentry tools, and lanterns.

Anticipated Later Needs •

Longer term needs will include support to agricultural and fishing sectors which are expected to have suffered heavy losses. The housing stock throughout the region is likely to be severely impacted and a major rehabilitation programme may have to be put in place.

Red Cross Objectives •

- to act as auxiliaries to the public authorities during the evacuation/emergency phase
- to continue first aid and medical support to the shelters
- to support feeding programmes to the homeless
- to ensure supplies of drinking water
- to ensure emergency shelter as well as clothing and blankets
- to support repairs to housing
- to respond to tracing requests
- to support longer-term rehabilitation needs

National Society/Federation Plan of Action

Emergency Phase

The International Federation and its member National Societies continue to respond to the emergency as indicated above. Operations centres have been established in both Santo Domingo and Antigua to handle the needs in the Greater and Lesser Antilles, respectively. Federation delegates are on the spot. The Federation office in Port-au-Prince will also be turned into an operations centre and an experienced logistician is on stand-by to assist once the hurricane has passed. The Dominican Republic Red Cross has a team available to assist the Haitian Red Cross should the need arise. The Regional Delegation continues to maintain contact with the Cuban and Bahamas Red Cross Societies regarding Hurricane *Georges'* forecast path.

A detailed plan of action will be available for the Dominican Republic Red Cross shortly. However, an inventory has been taken of existing stocks and warehouse space cleared in anticipation of a major relief operation with large needs for plastic sheeting, water purification tablets, blankets, and

construction materials. A Spanish-speaking relief delegate presently working for the Federation in Guyana will be redeployed to Santo Domingo.

In the meantime, the British Red Cross is mobilising 1,500 pieces of family size plastic sheeting for the East Caribbean; further supplies will follow. An estimated 3,000 families will require assistance to re-build their homes on St. Kitts and Antigua. It is also intended to support the provision of stocks of drinking water from Martinique and Guadeloupe for distribution by the Red Cross on Antigua.

Budget summary

See Annex 1 for details.

Conclusion

Hurricane *Georges* is not over yet. It is an on-going disaster for the people of the Caribbean. This Preliminary Appeal is being launched to support the continuing efforts of National Societies throughout the region in meeting the humanitarian demands placed on them by this unique weather system which continues to cause widespread destruction. Donors are urged to promptly respond to this Appeal in order to allow the Red Cross to capitalise fully on preparedness measures already in place and the on-going relief activities.

Margareta Wahlström
Under Secretary General,
Disaster Response & Operations Coordination

George Weber
Secretary General

	Annex 1
Caribbean: Hurricane Georges	
Preliminary appeal no. 29/98	CHF
Needs in cash	
Food and hygiene parcels	400,000
Rehabilitation materials incl. zinc sheets, nails, timber	800,000
Replacement emergency DP stocks	400,000
Plastic sheeting	240,000
Agricultural tools and seeds	160,000
Fishing equipment	160,000
Staff, transport, operating costs	160,000
Administration costs	80,000
Total	2,400,000
Cash on hand	0.00
Net preliminary request	2,400,000

