

# **CARIBBEAN: HURRICANE GEORGES**

22 March 1999

*appeal no. 29/98 (operation extended to 30 June)*

*situation report no. 3*

*period covered: 01 December 1998 - 12 March 1999*

---

*Red Cross emergency relief to those hardest-hit by Hurricane Georges in late September 1998 was almost over in February, having reached 47 per cent more people than targeted. The exception is the Dominican Republic, where a nine-month feeding programme begins this month for 156,000 beneficiaries to address the critical food shortages resulting from the destruction of 80 percent of the crops. The expanded relief operation pushed back the start of rehabilitation programmes in Cuba, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Antigua and Barbuda, and St. Kitts and Nevis, also supported by the International Federation appeal, launched on 2 October for CHF 10,221,000. This phase is now scheduled for completion in June.*

---

## ***The context***

Hurricane Georges ripped through the Caribbean in late September 1998, the worst storm in the region in a decade. It swept over Antigua and St. Kitts in the Eastern Caribbean, crossed Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic and Haiti and two thirds of Cuba and moved on to the Florida Keys and the U.S. Gulf Coast. In the Caribbean, after six days, the storm left more than 500 dead and 600,000 homeless.

On 2 October 1998, the International Federation issued an appeal for CHF 10,221,000 to assist 272,500 beneficiaries for six months, and undertake the rehabilitation of 14,500 homes. Relief efforts have concentrated on the worst-affected countries: Antigua and Barbuda, Cuba, Haiti, St. Kitts and Nevis, and particularly the Dominican Republic which bore the brunt of the storm.

In the course of the relief phase of the operation, more than 12,200 Red Cross volunteers across the region have helped provide assistance to over 343,000 hurricane victims -- 47 percent more than the appeal target. This increased total, reflecting more extensive hardship than originally foreseen, the continuing needs of the affected population and various operational constraints, forced National Societies to prolong the relief period until the end of February. Other factors which made it difficult to implement programme elements in the planned time frame included a major flood in St. Kitts in December and a prolonged drought in Cuba, as well as the deteriorating political and economic situation in Haiti. The rehabilitation phase, which was originally planned to be over by the end of March, has only just started and the completion date has therefore been moved back three months, until 30 June -- which also corresponds to the start of the 1999 hurricane season

## ***Latest events***

Rehabilitation efforts and capacity building initiatives are currently being implemented in all five countries affected by Hurricane Georges, while in the Dominican Republic the emergency phase is continuing with the start of a long term food distribution programme for 26,000 families. However, much of the vulnerable population affected by Hurricane Georges continues to suffer from the economic damage to the region's fragile tourism and agriculture industries, compounded by slow repairs to national social infrastructures.

## ***Red Cross/Red Crescent action***

### **Dominican Republic**

The Dominican Republic was the hardest hit by Georges. The hurricane was the most powerful to impact the country in 19 years, and late public warning and slow preparedness activities by the population contributed to the extensive loss of life and property. More than 80 percent of the crops were destroyed, threatening to provoke food shortages for at least a year. Temporary shelters remain open to accommodate many of the estimated 240,000 people who lost their homes. The government has built temporary housing, while other organisations are busy constructing permanent homes for affected families.

In February, the National Society completed a three month distribution programme, funded in part by the Italian Government and the European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO), which provided 13,000 destitute families with cooking sets, hygiene kits, and regular food parcels.

In March a major food assistance programme began for 156,000 beneficiaries in a partnership between the Dominican Republic Red Cross, the American Red Cross, the International Federation, and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). The USD 7.8 million programme will run for nine months and address the critical food shortages threatening the country's poorest families. Food staples of rice, beans, and cooking oil will be provided to 26,000 vulnerable families in shelters, farm communities, and poor rural and urban areas.

The Red Cross is revising its rehabilitation plan of action to better reflect current community needs and take into account the efforts of other organisations. A comprehensive needs assessment is underway across the country to assess the post-hurricane housing situation and discussions have begun with the government and NGOs to ensure that rehabilitation efforts are co-ordinated. An ECHO funded project with the Spanish Red Cross is underway to construct 1,500 homes in flood ravaged San Juan.

### **Haiti**

The main constraints in the Hurricane Georges operation in Haiti have been related to the very unstable and volatile political situation in the country and people's material poverty, a combination that has led to a very difficult security situation all over the country but particularly along the main roads and in the major towns. This had important consequences for the Haiti Red Cross's distribution of hygiene kits to 10,000 vulnerable families in the three provinces of Nippes, South-East, and West. It was far more time consuming than foreseen -- local suppliers of relief commodities were unable to deliver on time, Haitian Red Cross local committee members could not always move as planned from one village to the other to identify beneficiaries, fuel was not always available in the provinces when needed, and when vehicles broke down, it could take weeks to find spare parts.

After evaluations by the local Red Cross branches, the National Society carried out the distributions in three phases, from December 1998 to February 1999.

Province	District	Number of beneficiary families
Grand-Anse	Petite-Rivière de Nippes	600
	Petit-Trou de Nippes	500
	Miragoane	600
	Anse-à-Veau	800
	L'Azile	500
	Baradères	600
Sud-Est	Jacmel	2,439
	Cayes Jacmel	500
	Marigot	500
	La Vallée	500
	Bainet	660
	Côte-de-Fer	500
	Polycienne	301
L'Ouest	Croix-de-Missions	1,000
<b>TOTAL: 3 provinces</b>	<b>15 districts</b>	<b>10,000</b>

The constraints referred to above have led to considerable delay in the start up of the Haitian Red Cross plan for the rehabilitation of 500 houses destroyed in the Bas-Artibonite, Haut-Plateau, Nippes and South-East provinces. A delegate from the Regional Delegation in Santo Domingo is presently in Haiti to work on the technical details.

### Cuba

An estimated 147,000 Cuban citizens were severely affected by the hurricane. Although efficient community prevention activities clearly reduced the effects on people and property, there was extensive damage to housing -- 2,100 houses destroyed and approximately 40,000 damaged. Severe agricultural damage resulting from a prolonged drought in the Eastern Provinces was dramatically worsened by the hurricane. According to the UN, losses are estimated at US\$ 305.8 million.

The Cuban Red Cross has begun a rehabilitation programme to assist 1,634 vulnerable families in three of the Eastern provinces whose homes were partially or totally destroyed. It will mainly replace roof beams and corrugated iron roof sheets according to the following assessment:

Province	Communities	Families	Persons	Nature of Assistance	
				Roof sheets	Roof beams
Santiago de Cuba	24	207	809	11,190	97
Holguin	23	1,070	3,300	10,580	638
Guantánamo	6	357	1,516	10,993	696
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>1,634</b>	<b>5,625</b>	<b>32,763</b>	<b>1,431</b>

In February, distributions started in Guantánamo province. Cuban Red Cross volunteers distributed 1,544 roof sheets to 50 vulnerable families (239 persons) in the community of Bernardo, and 1,580 roof sheets to 57 vulnerable families (250 persons) in the community of Arroyo del Medio.

### St. Kitts and Nevis

In this small island-state, total losses are estimated at US\$ 445 million. 1,400 homes sustained major damage, with 216 completely destroyed. Major tourist facilities have only recently reopened. Most were closed for more than two months, forcing at least 2,300 people out of work. A 50 percent loss is forecast for this year's sugar harvest which, with tourism, accounts for 68 percent of total exports of goods and services.

Relief and recovery efforts were complicated and delayed by heavy rains that brought severe flooding in December. While building supplies are not difficult to obtain, repairs to homes and roofs have been slow due to lack of skilled labour in the country. Many families continue to live with relatives, while others have made temporary repairs to their homes, but are waiting anxiously for support to make final repairs before the start of the 1999 hurricane season in June.

In January, St. Kitts and Nevis Red Cross moved beyond the emergency phase and into its current focus on rehabilitation and capacity building. With support from the Italian Government and other donors, it has to date assisted in the repair of 44 homes and has built four new houses for vulnerable families. It is assisting 60 additional families repair their homes (primarily roof repairs) and is providing 20 families with household supplies and basic furniture to replace goods damaged by the storm and later rains.

A Red Cross rehabilitation beneficiary list coordinated with the government and other relief agencies has been drawn up, restricting support to families who own their home, lack insurance coverage, are in the low income bracket, and are not receiving any help from other organisations.

An important capacity building element is being implemented by the St. Kitts and Nevis Red Cross in close co-ordination with the Federation. This component encourages better coordination with other relief agencies, promotes vital radio communications between the islands of St. Kitts and Nevis, strengthens the visibility of the Red Cross, promotes the organisation as a valued source of preparedness information, and replenishes emergency stocks depleted during the hurricane. These activities will be complemented by the participation of the St. Kitts and Nevis Red Cross in the next phase of the regional Community-based Disaster Preparedness (CBDP) programme this year. The Caribbean CBDP programme, launched by the Federation in 1997, has trained over 100 Red Cross community disaster facilitators in five countries, and focuses on community preparedness training and education, disaster response training, logistics, emergency communications, and community disaster mitigation micro-projects.

### **Antigua and Barbuda**

After the eye of the storm passed over Antigua, the Antigua and Barbuda Red Cross reported 2,185 homes damaged and 450 destroyed. National disaster areas were declared in Libertad, Crabbe Hill, Five Islands, All Saints Village, and Bolans. While many hotels had to close for repairs, most reopened in time for the start of the tourist season in mid December.

Red Cross efforts have now shifted from emergency relief to rehabilitation, with plans to help 100 families repair damaged house roofs and assist fishermen replace more than 24,000 damaged traps.

## ***Outstanding needs***

The main outstanding need continues to be cash contributions to ensure that the rehabilitation and capacity building phase needs are met, as outlined in the Appeal. This is especially urgent with the approaching start of the 1999 hurricane season in June. With the presence of stratospheric winds, continuing warm North

Atlantic sea surface temperatures, and persistent La Niña conditions, early forecasts predict a 1999 season twice as active as the average, with projected intense storm activity even higher. Experts warn that recent hurricane activity suggests the beginning of a "new era" of more major hurricane activity and more intense storm landfalls in the Caribbean Basin.

Such warnings heighten the importance of the Community-Based Disaster Preparedness (CBDP) Programme. This year the programme will be expanded to include Belize, Cuba, Haiti, Dominican Republic, and St. Kitts and Nevis, all impacted by hurricanes in 1998.

A team of seven delegates is currently supporting the operation and working closely with the affected National Societies and the Regional Delegation based in Santo Domingo. Because of the volume of the operation and the extent of the support needed to assist some NSs it has become necessary to reinforce the regional team with a Regional Relief Coordinator position. Until now, this role has been assumed by the Institutional Development delegate, but he needs to return to his long-term focus in supporting the capacity building of the NSs.

## ***External Relations - Government /UN/NGOs/Media***

### **Hurricane Evaluation Meeting**

More than 350 experts from affected countries, donor organisations, the UN system, and the media attended an evaluation meeting on Hurricane Georges and Mitch in February in Santo Domingo, organised by the Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO). The Red Cross in the Caribbean was strongly represented with 17 representatives from 10 National Societies and the Regional Delegation. The four day meeting discussed lessons learned, including early warning, needs assessment, water and sanitation, medical care, psycho-social aspects, disease surveillance, food and nutrition, supply management, civilian-military coordination, information management, mass media, and the transition from emergency to reconstruction.

Red Cross delegates promoted a common message during the meeting, highlighting the unique qualities of the Movement and initiatives to strengthen capacity at the local level. They presented a series of recommendations at the conclusion of the meeting.

Red Cross participants from the Caribbean held their own two-day evaluation session following the PAHO Meeting to analyse the organisation's response to Hurricane Georges and identify possible implications for disaster preparedness in the region. The National Society delegates recommended that measures to improve capacity building in the Caribbean Red Cross National Societies should be considered for immediate implementation, including training programmes in the main facets of emergency relief and the developing of a cadre of delegates within the Caribbean for regional deployment.

In a continued partnership with the Red Cross, regional telecommunication provider Cable & Wireless is including a Hurricane Georges Red Cross fund raising appeal "bill stuffer" in their phone bills this month to 130,000 customers in Dominica, Grenada, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and the Cayman Islands. (In October, Cable & Wireless cosponsored a regional radiothon on World Disaster Preparedness Day to raise funds for the hurricane appeal and promote the importance of disaster preparedness for families year-round.)

## ***Conclusion***

The Federation has been active in the region throughout the crisis, and continues to work closely with the National Societies of the affected countries to assist the most vulnerable victims of this disaster. Continued financial support is needed in order to address the rehabilitation needs resulting from the widespread devastation left by Hurricane Georges and to support the ongoing disaster preparedness and capacity building activities of the National Societies in the region which will help prevent, prepare for, and respond to further emergencies.

Peter Rees-Gildea  
Director  
Operations Funding and  
Reporting Department

Santiago Gil  
Director  
Americas Department