

CARIBBEAN: HURRICANE KEITH

3 October 2000

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The Disaster

Hurricane Keith remained stationary over the northern area of Belize on Monday 2 October. Winds are gusting at 130 km per hour, but are steadily losing force over land. Nevertheless, Keith remains dangerous and its effects, primarily excessive rainfall, flooding and strong wind gusts, continue to be life threatening. It is expected that Keith will start a slow northwestward drift today, Tuesday, 3 October.

Reports from Belize indicate that flooding has destroyed many roads and others are blocked by trees. Storm surge flooding is up to 2 metres above normal tides along with battering waves affecting the northern coasts and cays, particularly San Pedro and the Ambergris cays in the popular tourist area close to the Mexican border. In addition, strong and steady winds have forced the sea levels to drop several feet, a potentially life threatening situation because the sea waters can rapidly return, causing extremely dangerous storm surges over the cays and along the beaches. In the areas north of Belize City and the capital, Belmopan, as far as the Mexican border, people remain confined to their houses or in shelters until the weather conditions improve. Communication with the coastal cays is maintained by radio and some telephone lines are still intact. Reports indicate heavy rains and much of the population is accommodated in hotels as well as shelters. Electricity has been cut off in most parts of Belize City, Belmopan and in the north. Belize City reports flooding of up to 2 meters of water and 50 houses have collapsed. The main hospitals have been evacuated and patients have been put up in shelters and hotels. At least half of the Belize City population has been evacuated to Belmopan and to San Ignacio. Many villages and towns are isolated due to flooding and mudslides.

The Mexican authorities have set up 300 shelters for 6,000 evacuees in the region of Chetumal. Heavy rains continue in Chetumal, Quintana Roo and the Yucatan Peninsula.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

The Mexican Red Cross is active in the shelters and is assisting with evacuation and rescue. The National Society is also sending by truck relief supplies consisting of food, water and sanitation materials, first aid and hygiene kits.

In Belize, the National Society headquarters has been flooded. Co-ordination of needs assessments and relief operations is managed directly from the Director General's home. Red Cross volunteers are evaluating the situation in the shelters in order to identify the priority needs. They are also distributing food and other relief supplies to the population in the shelters as well as providing first aid services and evacuating people to higher and safer ground. As soon as weather conditions improve, the Belize Red Cross Society (BRCS) will complete preliminary damage and needs assessments in order to prepare its plan of action and evaluate the need to issue an international appeal. This should be complete by the end of the current week. In accordance with the regional disaster response plan, the Federation's Regional Intervention Team (RIT) of five delegates from Canada, Ecuador, Costa Rica, Mexico and the Dominican Republic has arrived in Belize. In co-ordination with the BRCS, the team is now assessing the situation in the north and central regions. The American Red Cross is sending an additional 4 International Disaster Response Unit (IDRU) delegates who will join the Federation team. A second Federation RIT Team consisting of health, relief, logistics and water and sanitation delegates is in position in Mexico and on standby. A contingency plan to establish a logistics cell in Guatemala City to reinforce procurement and delivery by road to Belize is in place. The Pan American Disaster Response Co-ordination Officer is currently in Geneva and is co-ordinating support between the Americas Department and the Secretariat Disaster Response and Logistics Departments.

The Mexican Red Cross has provided invaluable support to facilitate the deployment of the Federation's RIT team in Belize. The Nicaraguan Red Cross reports that 336 families have been affected in 16 provinces and 3 persons have died in the flooding. There are also many persons reported missing and 4,000 people have been evacuated to temporary shelters.

The Costa Rican Red Cross reports 300 families affected by flooding in the Guanacaste zone and 352 persons are in shelters. Volunteers are active in rescue and evacuation activities. The El Salvadorian Red Cross is also active in rescue and evacuation of 280 families, mostly in the Santa Ana region.

Federation field co-ordination is managed by the Regional Delegations of Guatemala and Santo Domingo.

Needs

Given the dangerous situation as Hurricane Keith hovers, the Belize Red Cross has requested support from the Federation. In addition to the technical assistance mentioned above, a total of CHF 120,000 has been released from the Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) to support the Belize Red Cross Society's ongoing relief activities. Despite the lack of precise information, immediate needs are anticipated to be for plastic sheeting, emergency food supplies, water sanitation products as well as medical supplies, blankets, kitchen utensils and cots.

Additional information will be shared with National Societies as soon as it becomes available.

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