

INFORMATION BULLETIN



International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
Fédération internationale des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge
Federación Internacional de Sociedades de la Cruz Roja y de la Media Luna Roja
الاتحاد الدولي لجمعيات الصليب الأحمر والهلال الأحمر

CARIBBEAN: HURRICANE MICHELLE

13 November 2001

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This Information Bulletin is being issued based on the needs described below reflecting the information available at this time. While the Federation had intended to launch a Preliminary Appeal, the strategy has been adjusted and donors are now requested to direct their contributions to the Federation's Annual Appeal for the Caribbean Region Programmes, indicating "Hurricane Michelle- contribution for Cuba".

The Situation

Hurricane Michelle hit the southern coast of Cuba on Sunday 4 November with maximum sustained winds of 215 km/h (135 mph). It crossed the island on a south to northeast track, exiting off Cuba on the same day, and continuing on a trajectory towards the Bahamas. The hurricane brought heavy rains to a very extensive area of the island. While the danger of severe flooding was high, no widespread flooding was reported (with the exception of Jaguey Grande, in Matanzas). In the eastern provinces of Granma and Camaguey, rains continue and the risk of floods is still high. The most affected areas are Pinar del Rio, Ciudad de la Habana, Habana, Matanzas, Cienfuegos, Villa Clara, Sancti Spiritu, Ciego de Avila, and the Isle of Youth. These provinces represent 45% of the whole Cuban territory, and with 5,889,000 inhabitants which represents 53% of the total population. Despite the strength of the hurricane, only 5 people died with 8 injured. During the 48 hours prior to the hurricane, all of the Cuban western and central provinces were placed on alert, and a total of 694,129 people were evacuated in Cuba to areas with lower risk, among them 140,405 who were placed in shelters. Many people have now returned to their houses but there are still who are accommodated in emergency shelters as their houses have been destroyed. These persons will be moved to permanent shelters in the coming days while they wait for their houses to be reconstructed. In a very preliminary assessment it has been estimated that more than 45,000 houses might have been damaged but those figures could sharply increase as they do not include information from Cienfuegos and Villa Clara, two of the most affected provinces.

Significant damage to the health and education institutions has been reported, as follows:

- Health sector 3 mental institutions, 10 GP health centers, 12 chemists, and 1 hospital which provides services to 260,000 persons from 7 of the 14 municipalities and accounts for 33% of the total births of the province- have been seriously damaged.
- Education: 50 schools have been totally destroyed and 1,500 have been partially damaged.

The devastating winds and heavy rains that hit the island have caused extensive damage to local crops (i.e. potato, yams, sweet potato,), which will be affected for the next 5 months. Cuba's important banana production will be

affected for at least 10 months. The export of citrus fruits and sugar, two of the main Cuban income generation sources, have also been severely impacted.

Communications, water, gas and electricity services were affected by the hurricane. Two communication towers collapsed in Matanzas and in the Island of Youth. Communications in Villa Clara have been affected as well. Some 90% of water services have been reduced but the majority of electricity and water services are expected to be back to full status by early next week except in the provinces of Matanzas, Cienfuegos and Villa Clara (which will be completed by the end of November).

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

Government Action w

The government of Cuba declared emergency alerts and launched contingency plans. The Cuban Red Cross (CRC) representatives are participating in meetings convened by the authorities and Civil Defense as part of the national emergency systems. Local emergency committees are also co-ordinating their action with the Red Cross. Government authorities have been providing essential services to displaced populations through the Civil Defense, and the CRC is serving in an auxiliary capacity to this action.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action w

In Cuba the branches throughout the country have been active since 2 November. More than 12,000 Red Cross volunteers have participated in evacuations, distribution of relief items, and assisting evacuees from the communities identified above. Some 2,600 volunteers are currently assisting in the management of the temporary shelters and in providing first aid, primary health care and psychological support. The CRC is co-ordinating its action with the local authorities and the Civil Defense, and supplying them with assistance. The CRC is assessing their role depending on the final needs of the affected population with the objective of identifying groups/areas where there are immediate needs - food, medicine, water and hygienic kits, and clothing - for those groups who may still need post disaster assistance.

Co-ordination w

The Regional Delegation in Santo Domingo is co-ordinating the action with Americas Department in Geneva, the regional information delegate deployed to Cuba before the hurricane hit the island, as well as the regional delegation in Guatemala and the Pan-American Disaster Response Unit (PADRU). It has maintained contact with other organisations and potential donors such as WHO/OPS, OFDA, Médecins sans Frontières (Médicos sin Fronteras), ECHO's regional office in Santo Domingo, and the Spanish, American and Canadian Red Cross Societies .

Needs

As confirmed by the Cuban government, the assessment process is taking more time than expected due to the difficulties encountered in reaching some areas and the extension of the damages. After the preliminary damage-evaluation the Cuban government decided not to launch an international appeal, indicating however that any external support will be very welcomed. The CRC is assessing the situation in co-ordination with the local authorities. The CRC priorities are likely to be the provision of non-food assistance to those persons remaining homeless as a result of the hurricane. Inputs will include shelter materials, non-food relief items such as hygiene kits, kitchen sets, blankets and jerry cans, basic medicine and administrative support. Special attention will be made to provide psychological support to the victims. The CRC foresees a need for help in the repair and reconstruction of homes. Some of the Red Cross facilities have also been damaged. The Cienfuegos branch has collapsed and Santi Spiritus and Matanzas provincial branches have been partially destroyed. Some municipal branches have also suffer damages in their local facilities.

The CRC and the Federation are requesting those National Societies and organisations willing to support the Cuban National Society efforts to help Hurricane Michelle victims by sending contributions though the

Federation's Annual Appeal for the Caribbean Regional Programmes (no. 0132/2001), indicating "Hurricane Michelle- contribution for Cuba".

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All International Federation Operations seek to adhere to the Code of Conduct and are committed to the Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response (SPHERE Project) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable.

For support to or for further information concerning Federation operations in this or other countries, please access the Federation website at <http://www.ifrc.org>

For longer-term programmes, please refer to the Federation's Annual Appeal.

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