

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 & CENTRAL AMERICA: HURRICANE IRIS

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DREF (Disaster Relief Emergency Fund) Allocated: None

This Information Bulletin is being issued based on the needs described below reflecting the information available at this time. Based on further updates and details from assessment reports, the Federation will consider international support through a Preliminary Appeal.

The Situation

Hurricane Iris, a category 4 hurricane, made landfall in **Belize** on 8 October at approximately 20.45 hours local time. The eye of the hurricane passed over Independence and Placencia, small towns some 130 km south of coastal Belize City, with wind speeds of up to 225 kph (140 mph). The hurricane resulted in waves between 13 and 18 feet (4-5 metres) above normal and heavy rainfall which battered the coast. It is expected that a disaster area will be declared for all if not most of the Toledo District and part of South Stann Creek District. As a result of the compact nature of the hurricane, two districts, Stan Creek and Toledo, bore the brunt of its force. First assessment reports from the Belize Government National Emergency Management Organisation (NEMO) and the Belize Red Cross Society indicate that some 15,000 inhabitants of the coastal areas had been evacuated, reducing loss of life. Early reports from Placencia, a tourist resort and fishing village, state that more than 80 percent of the houses have been lost. There is also much roof damage and electricity poles are down. Seine Bight has also lost 90 percent of its buildings; it is anticipated that the majority of small villages in rural Toledo have been badly affected, although given the isolation of the mountainous region inhabited largely by subsistence farmers, it has not been possible to obtain information. In the village of San Marcos, only three houses remain standing out of 100. In San Antonio, 20 houses were destroyed. Between the villages of San Marcos, Big Falls and San Antonio, 400 people are homeless. In the village of Big Creek, most of the houses are upright but the roofs are gone. In Monkey River over 90 percent of the houses were destroyed. A medical team was dispatched to Independence Village. A medical team from San Ignacio is being dispatched to Placencia and one from Belmopan to Mango Creek.

It is now estimated that more than 25 people have lost their lives. As many as 20 American tourists are feared lost after the tourist dive boat M.V. "Wave Dancer" anchored at Big Creek was swamped and capsized by waves and wind. Preliminary figures indicate that at least 8,000 people (1,600 families) have been affected through loss or damage of their homes.

There is currently no flooding, although Toledo district may still receive heavy rain and in Mollejon, further inland, there are reports that the dam is swollen by 10 feet (3 metres) which could result in flooding and landslides in the Cayo and Belize districts. NEMO has dispatched 500 blankets and 14 tents that house 50 people each to Independence.

In **Guatemala**, heavy rains during the night of 8 October particularly affected the northern departments of Petén and Izabal. Civil defence authorities in Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras implemented states of alert in anticipation of heavy rains from Iris, and thousands of people left low-lying areas for higher ground.

Hurricane Iris, now a tropical depression over eastern Mexico, could continue to bring torrential rains to northern Central America and eastern Mexico with resulting flash floods and landslides.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

In **Belize**, the National Emergency Organisation (NEMO) met at 7.00 hours local time on 9 October and dispatched 500 blankets and 14 tents (50 people each) to Independence. A disaster assessment team flew over the affected area to make an initial assessment of needs.

Two Federation disaster response/delegates and one water and sanitation specialist reached Belize City on the morning of 9 October in order to coordinate the implementation of a damage and needs assessment together with the Belize Red Cross Society (BRCS). During the morning, Federation drivers left Guatemala for Belize with two landcruisers in order to support the damage assessment team and the relief operation. The Head of the Regional Delegation for the Caribbean, who will lead the team, the Regional Information delegate and the Disaster Response/Preparedness delegate will arrive in Belize today and tomorrow. Given the immediate presence of many delegates who responded to the last hurricane - Keith - in Belize a field assessment and coordination team (FACT) deployment is not needed but additional human resources may be required later (See needs)

The Belmopan branch of the BRCS mobilised an assessment team to travel south to the affected area, and has launched a national appeal for cash, clothing and food. Distribution centres in Punta Gorda, Toledo, have been set up by the BRCS and plastic raincoats, blankets and kitchen kits are being provided to those affected. Two trucks left the BRCS headquarters on 9 October, heading from Stan Creek with supplies of food, blankets and plastic raincoats. Initially, the BRCS intends to target 500 of the worst affected families with assistance and today will begin identification of beneficiaries in order that distributions may take place on Thursday, 11 October. At present, between 50 and 65 volunteers are working in the field and some 25 volunteers have been mobilised at headquarters. An OXFAM water specialist from Guatemala is coordinating possible activities with the Federation Water and Sanitation delegate.

In addition to the assessments which took place on 9 October, an aerial survey will be carried out today thanks to the loan of helicopters by the British army. The British army, which has 250 soldiers in Belize at a training centre, pledged to help in rescue operations.

In **Guatemala**, the Guatemalan Red Cross branch in Petén undertook an evaluation of families affected by the passage of the hurricane on the night of 8 October. Current figures indicate that some 530 families' homes were severely damaged as winds blew the roofs from their houses. Of these, some 390 are to be found in Santa Cruz de San Luis Poptún on the border with Belize where the roof was also ripped from the school. In Puerto Barrios, the Red Cross branch assisted in the evacuation of the villages of Quetzalito, Laguna and Pinalitos near to the course of the river Motagua, and 240 people were accommodated in shelters by the departmental authorities and the national disaster coordination body, CONRED. Following an assessment, it was ascertained that only minor damage had occurred, enabling those in the shelters to return home.

The American Red Cross has agreed to provide support for 390 families with the provision of plastic sheeting, blankets and hygiene kits. An IDRU team to support the relief operation and to address family support to American victims of the dive boat capsized are en route.

The German RC has confirmed possible in kind assistance from their inventory held by the Federation's Pan American Disaster Response Unit (PADRU) in Panama.

In El Salvador The Federation delegation will provide 1,000 reinforced plastic shelter kits for roofing material and 400 household hygiene kits which may be used either for the operation in Guatemala or Belize.

In Panama PADRU is providing logistics back up and the PADRU Water and Sanitation Delegate is coordinating materials and planning with the Federation Water and Sanitation delegate now in Belize.

In Geneva the head of Operations (Americas/Pacific) will coordinate Secretariat support. Contact has been made with OCHA who, at the request of the Belize Government, are deploying an UNDAC Team today from El Salvador who will meet up with the Red Cross team in Belize City. Contact has been made with a number of European participating National Societies (PNS) who have offered immediate assistance as needed.

A Preliminary appeal is anticipated as soon as confirmed assessment figures can be compiled today.

Needs

Initial findings of the assessment team in Belize indicate that major needs are for blankets and plastic sheeting since the community centres used for shelter of the homeless also lost their roofs during the hurricane. Hygiene kits, kitchen kits, water purification tablets and jerry cans are also urgently required. An immediate need to identify a Team Leader with extensive field experience to lead the anticipated relief action is urgently required. Further information regarding the hurricane disaster and Federation assistance will be provided as soon as it becomes available.

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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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