

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

9 April 2002

Information Bulletin N° 6/02

This 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 had 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, a category 4 storm, hit the southern coast of Cuba on 4 November 2001, with maximum sustained winds of 215km/h (135 mph). It caused extensive damage as it crossed the island from south to northeast. The most affected areas were Pinar del Rio, Ciudad de la Habana, Habana, Matanzas, Cienfuegos, Villa Clara, Sancti Spiritus, Ciego de Avila, and the Isle of Youth. These provinces make up 45% of Cuba's territory, with 5,889,000 inhabitants, which represents 53% of the total population.

Despite the strength of the hurricane, only five people died and eight were injured. A total of 694,129 people were evacuated to areas of lower risk, among them 140,405 were placed in emergency shelters. Many people have now returned to their houses but there are still people in shelters waiting for their houses to be reconstructed. It is estimated that in the provinces of Cienfuegos, Villa Clara, Sancti Spiritus and Ciego de Avila alone, more than 82,948 houses had been destroyed or damaged.

Significant damage to health and educational institutions was also reported. The devastating winds and heavy rains that hit the island caused extensive damage to local crops (i.e. potato, yams, sweet potato). Cuba's important banana production will be affected for at least six more months. The export of citrus fruits and sugar, two of the main Cuban income generation sources, have also been severely hit.

Communications, water, gas and electricity services were affected by the hurricane but have since been re-established.

Jamaica was also affected. Heavy rainfall caused flooding in St Catherine, St Thomas, Kingston and St Andrew, which added to the already precarious situation on the island after several weeks of continuous rain. An estimated 10,000 people were affected and five people died. Infrastructure was also extensively damaged. The Jamaican Red Cross is running a relief operation for flood victims benefiting 87 families, approximately 400 people, which provides basic food supplies and temporary roofing materials.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

Government Action

The Cuban government is prioritising the reconstruction of houses. Government authorities are providing essential services, such as food and health care, to people still in shelters through the Civil Defence. The Cuban Red Cross (CRC) is serving the government in an auxiliary capacity. CRC representatives are liaising with local authorities and the Civil Defence to provide a coordinated service, sharing resources and avoiding duplication.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

Currently, the CRC is concentrating its efforts in four of the worst-affected provinces, Cienfuegos, Villa Clara, Sancti Spiritus and Ciego de Avila, where an estimated 500 volunteers continue to assist evacuees and work in the reconstruction of houses.

In these provinces, with German Red Cross funds, the CRC has distributed water containers, sheets, towels, hair brushes, tooth brushes and pans, to 580 families. Under this operation, 356 families have had their roofs rebuilt. A total of 96 families - four in Cienfuegos, 32 in Sancti Spiritus and 60 in Ciego de Avila - have benefited from both household goods and reconstruction.

An additional 894 houses - 694 funded through the Federation and 200 through the Spanish Red Cross - will soon be reconstructed in the same area. Zinc sheeting for this purpose, purchased under the Federation and Spanish programmes, arrived in Cuba during March. The Spanish Red Cross is also distributing bed sheets.

It is foreseen that the French Red Cross will run a similar operation in the provinces mentioned above. In addition, the German Red Cross, with funds from the Swiss Red Cross, will run a rehabilitation programme in the province of Matanzas.

The Austrian Red Cross has expressed interest in supporting reconstruction of an additional 25 houses in Ciudad Habana that were damaged by the hurricane.

Co-ordination

The Regional Delegation in Santo Domingo is coordinating activities with the Americas Department of the Secretariat, the CRC, the Regional Delegation in Guatemala and the Pan-American Disaster Response Unit (PADRU) in Panama. It has also maintained close contact with other organizations and potential donors.

Needs

After a preliminary damage evaluation, the Cuban government decided not to launch an international appeal, indicating, however, that external support would be welcome. After an assessment carried out by the CRC in four of the most affected provinces: Villa Clara, Cienfuegos, Sancti Spiritus and Ciego de Avila, the National Society has identified the repair and reconstruction of houses as the priority. Inputs include zinc roof tiles, nails for wood and for zinc, cement and wood. For those families whose houses were destroyed, kitchen sets, mattresses, clothes, bed linen and towels are also needed. In addition, the CRC will use funds donated for Hurricane Michelle operations for the equipping of emergency teams in the four worst-affected provinces with relief items and first aid and search and rescue equipment, for use in future disasters.

The CRC and the Federation are requesting those National Societies and organizations willing to support the CRC's work to help hurricane Michelle victims, to send contributions through the Federation's annual appeal for the Caribbean regional programmes (no. 01.23/2002), indicating: 'Hurricane Michelle- contribution for Cuba'.

For a full description of the National Society profile, see www.ifrc.org

For further details please contact :

- *John Humphreys, Head of Regional Delegation, Santo Domingo; Phone (809) 567 3344; Mobile (809) 696 8820; Fax (809) 567 5395; email ifrcdr08@ifrc.org*
- *Leon Prop, Federation Desk Officer, Phone 41 22 730 4258; Fax 41 22 733 0395; email prop@ifrc.org*

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.

John Horekens
Head
Relationship Management Department

Santiago Gil
Head
Americas Department