

CARIBBEAN: HURRICANE GEORGES

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The Disaster

Fluctuating between a Force 3 and a Force 4, Hurricane Georges continues to plough a destructive path through the Caribbean, packing 130 mph winds and bringing heavy rain in its wake. It is now threatening the Dominican Republic, Haiti and Cuba. Since Monday, five deaths have been reported so far in Puerto Rico (3) and Antigua (2). Airports were closed in the Leeward Islands of Antigua and Barbuda, St. Kitts and Nevis and Montserrat as Red Cross clean-up operations and damage assessment got underway.

From initial assessments, St. Kitts seems to have been the most severely impacted by Georges with residents reporting that it was worse than Hurricane Hugo in 1989 and many homes have lost their roofs. Red Cross reports two deaths on Antigua and 20 to 25 people injured; there is much roof damage across the island. While there was extensive flood damage to housing on Montserrat, the impact was less severe than had been feared; however there continues to be some anxiety about the possibility of mud flows triggered by rain and volcanic debris.

The National Hurricane Centre in Miami reported that while winds had diminished from the 150 mph recorded on Sunday, they remain extremely dangerous. President Clinton declared states of emergency in the US Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico.

Hurricane watches are in effect for the south-eastern Bahamas and the Turks and Caicos islands. Hurricane warnings remain in effect for the US and British Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic and Haiti. In Cuba, the Interior Ministry issued a hurricane warning to residents of the island's easternmost provinces which have been badly affected by drought in recent months.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

ANTIGUA & BARBUDA

Communication with the Red Cross by HF radio confirms two deaths and 20-25 people seriously injured in Antigua which saw the eye pass the Southern part of the island with 115 mph winds. The island experienced strong winds, but not too much rain, resulting in roof and structural damage across the island. Initial damage assessment is still underway so no confirmed figures are yet available. About 10 percent of St. Johns, the island's capital, is reported to have suffered serious damage. Sunday night the Red Cross provided assistance to the 6,200 people in 125 shelters and on Monday began issuing food and cots to shelter residents. It is anticipated that the Red Cross food

stock will be depleted by Wednesday, forcing the Red Cross to purchase food directly from stores. Immediate needs for Antigua include plastic sheeting and drinking water.

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Preparation activities are well underway for Georges' projected impact in the Dominican Republic later today, with the Red Cross co-ordinating activities with the Civil Defence, Ministry of Health, and the Army. The hurricane is expected to pass the Northern part of the island and the airports in this region have been closed. Hurricane force winds are expected for the entire country. The Red Cross is stocking up on basic food items and has cleared two warehouses to store relief supplies. An additional 300m² warehouse has been cleared and made available to the Federation. Water, first aid supplies, and tools will be donated by different companies and government agencies and the Government and Santo Domingo council is donating USD 4,000 to support the Red Cross operation. The Red Cross emergency teams are on 24-hour alert, with access to 10 vehicles, including two that the Federation will make available.

Four damage assessment volunteers left Monday evening to the North where the hurricane is expected to inflict the most damage and radio communications have been established between the HQ, branches, and the Regional Delegation. Branch emergency teams are on alert and are prepared to support shelter management, first aid, transportation, and damage assessment, as well as provide community information. The Red Cross Communications Centre has been established to facilitate information to the media, authorities, and general public and the Red Cross has been highlighted in the media as a lead agency in hurricane preparation activities.

HAITI

Haiti will begin to feel the effect of Georges by as early as Tuesday afternoon (local time) as the storm is projected to pass the Northern section of the country. It is a major concern that there appears to be little public awareness or preparedness activities regarding the approaching storm. The Federation's office in Port-au-Prince is on alert and is issuing hurricane preparedness press releases for the public in both French and Creole. The Federation's representative in Haiti is at the Haitian Red Cross offices to assist preparedness activities. A damage assessment team from the Dominican Republic Red Cross remains on stand-by for possible deployment to support relief activities in Haiti.

BAHAMAS

The Bahamas remain at serious risk from Georges which is forecast to pass just South of the island chain but could turn North and result in severe devastation to the nation's 100 inhabited islands. The Bahamas Red Cross has issued a strong public advisory for the Southern Family Islands, encouraging all residents to identify safe shelter now. During a disaster, the Bahamas Red Cross is responsible for managing shelters and relief distribution, but with so many islands scattered across such a wide area this is clearly a challenge.

CUBA

While Georges, like all hurricanes, is extremely unpredictable, if the storm maintains its current course it will begin to impact the Eastern portion of Cuba on Wednesday. While passing to the North of the island, it will still bring powerful winds. The Cuban Red Cross Monday issued a public information alert advising residents in the East to monitor newscasts and storm movements closely and to begin preparedness activities.

DOMINICA

The Dominica Red Cross Community Disaster Preparedness facilitators performed the initial damage assessment Monday morning and reported no significant infrastructure damage, although there have been some crop losses. Prior to the storm's arrival in the region, the Red Cross provided emergency supplies and assistance to shelters. The Dominica Red Cross is closely monitoring the Caribbean Red Cross radio frequency and sharing reports with the Regional Delegation in Santo Domingo, as they are provided by other islands.

MONTserrat

Although it was feared that Montserrat would suffer a direct hit from Georges, the tiny island appears to have been spared major damage. Heavy winds were reported around midnight Sunday

and continued until 3 am. Monday morning. Steady rain was resulting in some street flooding, and could cause mud flows from the active volcano, the dome of which had a partial collapse just two days ago. The Red Cross reports no damage to the recently completed Golden Years Home for the Elderly and reports that all residents in the temporary volcano shelters and government-built wooden houses survived the night.

ST KITTS & NEVIS

From initial accounts, St. Kitts seems to have been severely impacted by Georges, with residents reporting that it was worse than Hurricane Hugo in 1989. Preliminary damage assessment of some 600 homes on the island show that 80 to 85 percent have either lost their roof or their roof is severely damaged. The Red Cross building lost part of its roof which destroyed its communications equipment. Four homes were completely destroyed. In nearby Nevis, the situation does not seem to be as severe, but there were also some roof losses and other damage. 15 people were in the Red Cross shelter in Nevis last night and an unconfirmed number remain in two government shelters in St Kitts. The Red Cross has begun a feeding programme in the shelters and has an immediate need for plastic sheeting, nails, hammers, and plywood, with manpower to help.

TURKS & CAICOS

The Turks & Caicos Red Cross has issued a press release with hurricane tips and is meeting with government representatives to discuss the islands' state of preparedness. Georges may impact the islands with strong winds and rain later today.

REGIONAL DELEGATION

The Regional Delegation has been in contact either directly or via radio messages with all impacted islands in the Eastern Caribbean. There is considerable concern regarding the extensive damage in St. Kitts and Antigua and a disaster delegate is being sent to the East Caribbean. The immediate needs on both islands are plastic sheeting and related supplies to provide temporary repairs to roofs. Foodstuffs which can be obtained locally are also required. Antigua also reports an urgent need for drinking water.

The Delegation has also been working closely with the Dominican Republic Red Cross, the next island to be threatened by Georges, and with Haiti, Cuba, Turks & Caicos, and the Bahamas. In anticipation of a major relief operation in the Dominican Republic and Haiti, the Dominican Republic Red Cross has cleared a warehouse for the Federation; HF and VHF radio communications systems are functioning well.

The Regional Delegation has made its own preparations for the arrival of Georges on Tuesday and will be moving its operations to the acting Head of Delegation's home when weather conditions begin to deteriorate. National Societies have been informed that the Santo Domingo office may lose electricity and phones by mid-day and have been instructed to then contact the Federation's office in Kingston.

Needs

A preliminary appeal is now in the course of preparation. CHF 100,000 is being released from the Federation's Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) to meet immediate needs in the Eastern Caribbean and to boost preparedness in the Greater Antilles.

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