

BAHAMAS: HURRICANE FLOYD

17 September 1999

Information Bulletin N° 2

The Situation

Hurricane Floyd passed over the Bahamas on 14 and 15 September with winds of more than 250 kms per hour, forming a storm surge of flooding well above normal tide levels. Information and details about the scope of the disaster remain unclear as damage assessments by the authorities and the Red Cross are still underway in this country made up of 700 islands (over 30 inhabited) and 2,000 uninhabited cays, totalling 13,940 square kms, and home to over 260,000 inhabitants.

Gathering information has been difficult because the telecommunication system between the capital island (New Providence) and the other islands was completely out of commission until Wednesday afternoon when they were gradually re-established between the five most populated islands. Updated reports indicate only one death (in Nassau, the capital), and four missing people, but information about damage or injuries in the six most affected islands (Cat, Abaco, Grand Bahamas, Eleuthera, Harbour and Governor) is still fragmented.

Preliminary reports from OCHA and other agencies state the hurricane blew over power and telecommunication lines, uplifted trees, ripped roofs off homes, damaged docks, and blocked many roads. The Federation's Regional Delegation for the Caribbean reported on Thursday (16 September) that 60% of all the roads in New Providence, including the main roads, had already been cleared and the power and telephone companies were making progress in restoring power and phones.

Yesterday, the Prime Minister held a second Cabinet meeting since the event, inviting the National Society to participate. A state of disaster has not been declared yet, but the Prime Minister in an address to the Nation on Wednesday evening indicated that the country may require external assistance for the restoration of utility services. He also stated the needs for canned food and building materials.

Limited service resumed at the Nassau airport Wednesday afternoon, and is expected to be fully restored by today. Preliminary air reconnaissance also started on Thursday afternoon with the Prime Minister joining the aerial survey teams. The United States Government has indicated it will support this action by providing a helicopter.

Efforts are underway to assess the availability of food and water supplies, the heavy damage to infrastructure and homes, destruction of crops, and the salinisation of the land which may have a long-term impact on agricultural production.

Representatives of PAHO (Suma programme), CDERA (Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency), and other major international agencies were expected to arrive in Nassau yesterday and today to assist in the impact and needs assessments. CARILEC (the Caribbean Electrical Corporation) has assigned 22 electricians to help the Bahamas in the restoration of the power supply.

Meanwhile, attention was also focused on a new threat to the Caribbean and the Bahamas presented by Hurricane Gert. Miami's National Weather Service reported that Gert was located about 1,760 kms south-southeast of Bermuda, moving towards west-northwest at 16 kms per hour.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

The 41 shelters operated by the Bahamas Red Cross were closed by yesterday afternoon as families returned to their homes. But the National Society is now engaged in distributing drinking water, canned food, and other supplies to the most affected islands.

The International Federation's Regional Delegation for the Caribbean, in Santo Domingo, has deployed three delegates with two HF sets and four satellite phones to help the Bahamas Red Cross headquarters to re-establish its communications with its local branches and other correspondents. These delegates will be joined by two representatives from the American Red Cross with satellite telephone capability to support the local Red Cross communication system.

The American Red Cross was also reported to be dispatching 10 field tents, hygiene kits, 6,000 tropical blankets, and 100 rolls of plastic sheeting.

The Regional Delegation has requested the National Society to confirm its capacity to carry out tracing requests.

Needs

Apart from telecommunications, the Bahamas Red Cross has not requested further assistance. However, the situation is still unclear with regards to some of the islands, and communications have not yet been re-established with San Salvador and Cat Island. A joint report is anticipated from the National Society and the Federation Delegates, providing further details related to the needs.

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