

CUBA: HURRICANE LILI

4 March 1997

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situation report no. 2

period covered: 03 December - 28 February

The operation has distributed relief goods to 30,000 beneficiaries in eight affected provinces and is now preparing to address rehabilitation needs by supplying building materials and water purification chemicals -- goods which are scheduled to arrive later this month. A survey of radio-communication needs has been carried out and it is hoped to introduce improvements before the next hurricane season begins in July.

The context

Cuba was the worst-affected country in the Caribbean by the 1996 hurricane season. The overall combined hurricane activity for 1995 and 1996 was more than in any previous two consecutive years on record. Hurricane Lili was one of nine hurricanes and four other named tropical storms to hit the region last year. It crossed the island with devastating effect on 18 October forcing the evacuation of 269,995 people. In the immediate aftermath of the disaster 66,681 people lived in temporary shelters for several weeks before returning home or moving in with relatives and friends. Altogether, 5,781 homes were destroyed and 78,855 damaged.

The Regional Delegation has had two delegates working in-country as part of a team with the Cuban Red Cross Society (CRCS) since 20 October. An appeal was launched on 2 November seeking CHF 2,126,000 for assistance covering food and other basic relief items, support for anti-epidemic measures and housing materials. Some 30,000 people have been assisted to date in the affected provinces of Pinar del Rio, La Havana, Havana City, Matanzas, Villa Clara, Cienfuegos, Sancti Spiritus and Ciego de Avila.

Earlier donations from the Canadian Red Cross and the Spanish Red Cross enabled CRCS to assist 19,257 people with ORS, water purification tablets, water containers, sleeping apparel and blankets. Distributions have also taken place of American Red Cross-supplied foodstuffs to 7,200 people. Some 5,000 families benefited from just completed distributions of German Red Cross-procured mattresses, sheets, soaps and detergent. A major shipment of housing materials from the American Red Cross is expected to arrive shortly.

The appeal response to date is CHF 763,195 in cash, kind and services. The Federation Secretariat released CHF 200,000 from the Disaster Relief Emergency Fund on 22 October. Part of these funds enabled the operation to get underway just days after the hurricane.

Latest events

The vast majority of people have now returned to their homes, though many continue to live without a roof over their heads. The threat of water-borne disease remains, particularly in the province of Matanzas, due to perennial shortages of water purification materials. However, no major outbreaks have been reported since the rise in figures in the aftermath of Hurricane Lili. The American Red Cross is currently negotiating the despatch of a significant shipment of chlorine materials.

The logistics situation is difficult due to congestion in the port of Havana and shortages of transport and fuel in the country. However, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Investment and External Co-operation (MINVEC) continue to support the Red Cross operation with available resources.

The Head of Regional Delegation visited the CRCS in early February and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to discuss future co-operation.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

Two shipments of 9.5 tons of food parcels provided through the American Red Cross arrived in Cuba on 7 and 8 December. A total of 704 parcels were received and divided equally between the following parcel types: *Box No. 1* comprised 3 kg black beans; one toothpaste; one kg detergent; one packet of 24 stock cubes; four bars of soap; ten cans of tuna; eight cans of mixed vegetables; two boxes of cereal; four cans of milk powder. *Box No. 2* comprised four packets of flour; two bottles of oil; two kg sugar; two kg rice; four toilet rolls; six packets of pasta; one kg salt.

Distribution started on 19 December and finished on 28 December, serving 1,200 families (7,200 beneficiaries), with boxes being divided according to family size. Distributions were carried out in Matanzas, Cienfuegos and Sancti Spiritus.

The distribution by Red Cross volunteers in the provinces went well, with the co-operation of MINVEC which provided warehousing and port handling and the Ministry of Health which provided transport. Because of the needs of the population who often suffer scarcities, food distribution can be problematic and is usually the sole sphere of the government. In this case, significantly, the Red Cross distributed directly to beneficiaries with the agreement of the government.

Distributions have just been completed of a German Red Cross consignment comprising 4,500 mattresses; 6,417 kgs soap; 6,417 kgs detergent soap; and 6,417 bed sheets. Supplies went to 361 families (1,444 people) in Matanzas and 200 families in Villa Clara.

Clearing the goods from the port proved to be a major logistical exercise and transport fuel shortages were another problem. There were also some difficulties in relation to the descriptions of the shipment on the bills of lading. Warehouse space was at a premium as the annual food relief from ECHO was also arriving at this time.

Building materials procured for the International Federation by the American Red Cross are due to arrive in Cuba shortly. The consignment consists of 36,596 corrugated steel roofing sheets; 120 - 50 lb/ boxes 2" galvanised roofing nails; 92 - 50lb/boxes of 5" galvanised standard construction nails; 72 pairs gloves; 432 claw hammers; 100 gallons construction sealant; 960 - 25 lb/pails, calcium hypochlorite; 96 - 10 Kg drums, calcium hypochlorite; 210 - one gallon bottles, sodium hypochlorite.

The Cuban Red Cross received \$9,700 from the French Embassy in December. This was used to buy 2,400 corrugated zinc sheets which were distributed in Cienaga de Zapata to help re-roof 30 houses totally and another 30 partially.

In addition to relief support, the Federation assigned a radio-communications expert to Cuba for ten days in February to carry out the third phase of the appeal. His primary objective was to assess the radio-communications needs of the National Society at provincial level, since communications were a major constraint on information gathering in the early days of the Hurricane Lili operation. It is hoped to make improvements before the next hurricane season commences in July. The operation continues to make full use of a satellite phone loaned to the Regional Delegation by PAHO.

An American Red Cross Delegation that included the Vice President for International Services and an International Services Programme Officer visited Cuba on 4 December. They visited people in shelters in Cienfuegos and held discussions with the CRCS and Federation. In early January a second delegation visited a hospital in Cienfuegos and a damaged centre for water purification.

Outstanding needs

The appeal has so far raised 36% of the CHF 2,216,000 requested. Additional funds are needed to reimburse the loan made by the Disaster Relief Emergency Fund and to strengthen the capacity of the CRCS in disaster response, particularly through the development of its radio-communications network.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

Relations with the local authorities continue to be cordial. Widespread media coverage has been achieved and the local press continues to report on distributions.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

Conclusion

With logistics support from the American Red Cross, the operation expects to be able to respond shortly to rehabilitation needs in both the housing and water purification sectors. It is envisaged that this part of the operation could run until the end of April. The Colombian Red Cross and the Dominican Republic Red Cross have generously provided delegates to support the operation.

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