

CARIBBEAN: HURRICANE GEORGES

13 October 1998

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Relief and clean-up operations are underway in the Caribbean after the onslaught by Hurricane Georges which left 500 people dead and 300,000 still in temporary shelters. National Societies in Cuba, Dominican Republic, Haiti and the Eastern Caribbean islands of Antigua and St. Kitts are being supported in relief, clean-up and rehabilitation operations by the International Federation, which launched an Appeal on 2 October for CHF 10,221,000.

The context

Plans of action have been finalised and/or are being implemented in all five countries in the Caribbean where the International Federation is supporting relief operations in response to Hurricane *Georges*: Cuba, Dominican Republic, Haiti, and the Eastern Caribbean islands of Antigua and St. Kitts. In order to provide support to the National Societies of the affected countries, the International Federation launched an Appeal on 2 October for CHF 10,221,000 to assist 272,500 beneficiaries for six months. The emergency phase is continuing with Red Cross volunteers deployed throughout the region in support of over 300,000 people still living in shelters, and providing assistance to others to return to their homes. Official figures to date indicate that over 500 people are dead or missing. Information from Haiti indicates that the country is facing severe problems in coming to grips with the damage caused. Delegates from the Participating National Societies of Britain, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain and the United States have augmented the Federation's presence in the region to 13 delegates during the emergency response phase.

Latest events

Over 300,000 people throughout the region continue to live in shelters or to board with relatives and friends. Shortages of food, sanitation and hygiene materials continue to be of major concern. Vector control is also a preoccupation, particularly in Haiti where flood waters remain high. Haiti's Artibonite valley is of particular concern as thousands have been displaced by flooding and much damage has been done to this prime agricultural area. The UN Food and Agriculture

Organisation is currently engaged in a major evaluation of the effects on food production in Haiti concentrating on crops, livestock and the fishing sector. The Jacmel branch of the Haitian Red Cross is reporting exorbitant price rises as merchants exploit the food shortages in the south-east. The restoration of main services throughout the affected islands continues to be a major need. The problems in cleaning up after Hurricane *Georges* are illustrated by the fact that in Santo Domingo alone, the streets are estimated to be clogged with 150,000 cubic metres of garbage.

A successful fund-raising initiative took place over the weekend in the United States during a telethon sponsored by the Telemundo network during which a significant donation towards disaster relief in the Caribbean was received from Major League Baseball through the American Red Cross.

Red Cross Action

Cuba •

The Cuban Red Cross has carried out an initial needs assessment and estimates that 2,100 houses were destroyed by Hurricane *Georges* out of a total of 40,000 damaged. The number of persons severely affected is now estimated at 147,000. Results of an assessment carried out by the Cuban Red Cross received this week include the need for: food; household items such as mattresses, linen and towels; hygiene kits; water purification tablets; and construction materials. A German Red Cross delegate is now in Cuba and will co-operate with the Cuban Red Cross and the Regional Delegation in responding to the needs.

Dominican Republic •

The Red Cross has provided plastic sheeting for 7,795 families and distributed over 120 metric tonnes of relief supplies. Red Cross assessments have now been carried out in all affected areas. 3,350 Red Cross volunteers have been mobilised. A warehouse is being opened in Barahona to support emergency relief distributions in the western region. Red Cross continues to play a key co-ordination role for the NGO sector.

Conditions are improving in the eastern provinces but remain difficult in the more rural west. The Red Cross is sending all food and water received to Barahona, Bahoruco and San Juan. Rehabilitation supplies are also being sent to La Romana, San Pedro de Macoris and Distrito National. Funds received in response to the Appeal are being used to target 10,000 vulnerable families with food supplies, hygiene kits and cooking sets. A further rehabilitation phase will follow concentrating on house repairs with the provision of zinc sheeting and carpentry tools. Basic medicaments are also being provided through Red Cross first aid/ health posts. A basic health survey will be conducted by five Red cross medical teams this week. Posters have been prepared for display in shelters showing how to deal with water and garbage. There are confirmed reports of two babies dying of dehydration; outbreaks of skin and eye infections and cases of diarrhoea are now common in the shelters.

The Regional Delegation has been strengthened by the arrival of delegates from the American Red Cross (three logisticians and a disaster welfare inquiry delegate) and a Spanish Red Cross delegate with responsibility for ECHO-funded distributions.

Haiti •

Two experienced relief and logistics delegates from the Belgian Red Cross and the Netherlands Red Cross joined the Federation's Haitian office this weekend. A plan of action has been agreed upon with the Haitian Red Cross which will target 10,000 vulnerable families with hygiene and cooking sets. Haitian Red Cross volunteers are also available to assist in a PAHO/WHO campaign to carry out chemical spraying against mosquitoes. A rehabilitation phase concentrating on house repairs will follow.

However, while other immediate needs are being met by other organisations, it is clear that the role of the Red Cross in responding to this disaster may expand in co-ordination with other agencies over the coming weeks. Much will depend on the FAO-led evaluation now underway and due to be ready by early next week. However, preliminary estimates show that crop losses in Cap Haitian are running at between 50% and 75% and prices have already begun to increase dramatically. In the Plateau Central which was seriously affected by the overflow from the Peligre Dam, maize prices have risen by one-third and seeds are needed for planting. More than 50% of the Artibonite valley suffered damage from flooding. It accounts for 60% of the rice production in the country. Supplies will be somewhat stabilised in time for the next harvest in February 1998 only if the floodwaters recede to allow planting later this month. Many small villages have been washed away; as many as 200,000 people depending on agriculture may have been affected in the Artibonite region.

In the first report received from a Haitian Red Cross branch outside of Port-au-Prince, the Regional Committee for the South-East, based in Jacmel, reports that together with needs assessments they have been providing support to five shelters including first aid, water purification tablets, some food and clothing. Much of the region continues to be cut-off or only accessible by four-wheel drive vehicles. The Red Cross describes an extremely difficult situation for the people of the area, worsened by exorbitant price rises.

Antigua •

The Antigua Red Cross has distributed plastic sheeting to 780 homes and continues to support a small number of beneficiaries with food distributions. Plans are now underway for support to people in repairing their homes with the provision of zinc sheeting and tools to carry out repairs. A British Red Cross logistician based in Antigua has also been supporting the operation.

St. Kitts •

The Antigua and Barbuda Red Cross sent a team to assist their colleagues in St. Kitts for a week with needs assessments and the distribution of 600 plastic sheets received from British Red Cross. Some food distribution is also underway but the main need now is to assist the local population in repairing their homes.

Outstanding needs

The main outstanding need continues to be cash to ensure the total implementation of the operation and to meet all the emergency needs outlined in the Appeal.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

Conclusion

Continued financial support is needed in order to address the relief, hygiene and rehabilitation needs resulting from the widespread devastation left by Hurricane *Georges*. The International Federation has been present in the region throughout the crisis and has been working closely with the National Societies of the affected countries to assist the most vulnerable victims of this natural disaster.

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