

# 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**

5 February 2002

*Information Bulletin N° 5/02*

*Disaster relief emergency fund (DREF) Allocated: None*

*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 (01.23/2002), indicating "Hurricane Michelle-contribution for Cuba".*

### ***The Situation***

Category 4 hurricane Michelle hit the southern coast of Cuba on Sunday 4 November with maximum sustained winds of 215km/h (135 mph). It crossed the island on a south to northeast track, exiting off Cuba on the same day, and continued on a trajectory towards the Bahamas. The hurricane brought heavy rains to an extensive area of the island. The most affected areas were Pinar del Rio, Ciudad de la Habana, Habana, Matanzas, Cienfuegos, Villa Clara, Sancti Spiritu, Ciego de Avila, and the Isle of Youth. These provinces make up 45% of Cuban territory, with 5,889,000 inhabitants which represents 53% of the total population.

Five people died and eight were injured. During the 48 hours prior to the hurricane, all of the Cuban western and central provinces were placed on alert, and a total of 694,129 people were evacuated to areas with lower risk, among them 140,405 evacuees who were placed in emergency shelters. Many people have now returned to their houses but an estimated 1,440 persons - 286 in Cienfuegos and 1,154 in Villa Clara - are still in permanent shelters where they have been moved while they wait for their houses to be reconstructed. This data does not include information from Matanzas, one of the most affected provinces.

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, 60,180 of which still need to be reconstructed. No further official figures have been released so far.

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

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

## ***Red Cross/Red Crescent Action***

### **Government Action**

The Cuban government is prioritising the reconstruction of houses, by using reserves of zinc roof tiles and general construction materials available in the country. Government authorities are providing essential services, such as food and health care, to persons still in shelters through the Civil Defence. They are also relocating students to various schools. The Cuban Red Cross (CRC) is serving the government in an auxiliary capacity to carry out these actions. CRC representatives are participating in meetings convened by the authorities and Civil Defence as part of the national emergency systems, at a provincial and local level.

### **Red Cross/Red Crescent Action**

The Cuban Red Cross branches throughout the country were very active during the emergency. More than 12,000 Red Cross volunteers participated in evacuations, distribution of relief items, and helped evacuees from the communities. Some 2,600 volunteers assisted in the management of the temporary shelters and in providing first aid, primary health care and psychological support during the first days after the disaster. Currently, an estimated 200 volunteers continue to assist evacuees and in the reconstruction of houses, both through the government and the German Red Cross, which is reconstructing 300 houses in the provinces of Cienfuegos, Villa Clara, Sancti Spiritus and Ciego de Avila.

Although the CRC, following its government's position, decided not to launch an international appeal, support has been received from the Federation and two National Societies working bilaterally - the German and the Spanish Red Cross - for work in the reconstruction phase. So far, the Federation has received funds from the British Department for International Development (DFID), the Swedish government via the Swedish Red Cross and private donations, to support the CRC in reconstructing houses in four of the most affected provinces: Cienfuegos, Villa Clara, Sancti Spiritus and Ciego de Avila. Under this operation, a total of 600 houses will be reconstructed, benefiting approximately 3,000 persons.

### **Coordination**

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). 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 first priority. Inputs include zinc roof tiles, nails, cement and wood. For those families whose houses were destroyed, kitchen sets, mattresses, clothes, bed linen and towels are also needed.

The CRC and the Federation are requesting those National Societies and organizations willing to support the Cuban Red Cross's work to help hurricane Michelle victims, to send contributions through the Federation's annual appeal for the Caribbean regional programmes (Appeal 01.23/2002), indicating: "Hurricane Michelle-contribution for Cuba".

For a full description of the National Society profile, see [www.ifrc.org](http://www.ifrc.org)

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*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.*

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