

CARIBBEAN: HURRICANE GEORGES

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The Disaster

Hurricane Georges has disrupted the lives of millions of people throughout the Caribbean since its arrival late on Sunday, September 20. Its killer winds took 24 hours to cross the island of Hispaniola leaving hundreds dead and/or missing in the wake of its 120 mph winds and torrential rains. It is now estimated that at least 600,000 people are severely affected in Haiti and the Dominican Republic, lacking access to the most basic necessities of life such as clean drinking water, shelter and proper sanitation. The capital cities of the two countries, Port-au-Prince and Santo Domingo are badly affected. Whole communities have been wiped out. Damage to infrastructure has been enormous. Over 300,000 people are still living in shelters.

Although the scale of the damage is less, thousands of people have also been left homeless in Cuba, and on the islands of Antigua and St. Kitts in the Eastern Caribbean.

Red Cross staff and volunteers have been working round the clock to bring relief to the homeless and injured. In the Dominican Republic, home base of the Federation's Regional Delegation, the Red Cross is co-ordinating the overall relief effort at the request of the Government. Technical support is being provided to operational centres in the Dominican Republic, Haiti and Antigua by a team of 11 delegates.

The International Federation, in partnership with its National Societies in the region, launched a preliminary appeal seeking CHF 2.4 million to assist the emergency phase. A full revised appeal is now under preparation. CHF 200,000 has been released from the Disaster Relief Emergency Fund to support relief actions.

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

GOVERNMENT FIGURES as of 27 September:

201 deaths

551 injuries

90 missing

286,908 people living in 749 shelters

\$1.2 billion losses

Red Cross took part in a low-level flight over the stricken areas. The most severely impacted areas include the south-east provinces of La Romana and San Pedro de Macoris, the south-central

province of Distrito Nacional which includes Santo Domingo, and the south-west provinces of San Juan, Bahoruco and Barahona where farm lands and mountain villages suffered great damage.

The number of missing/dead may rise as it is not yet known how many people died from the reported overflow from the Sabaneta Dam in San Juan de la Maguana which flooded Mesopotamia town. Hundreds of people have unofficially been reported missing in this incident. In another incident, 30 people were killed when a government operated shelter was washed away at the height of the storm. In San Pedro de Macoris, the two communities of Ingenio Consuelo and Quiqueya, previously home to 40,000 people, have been totally destroyed.

Brigades from the Ministry of Public Works have been working on restoring land communication to the south-western provinces of Barahona, Pedernales, Baoruco and Independencia where the bridges over Yaque de Sur River were brought down by the force of waters flowing from regional dams. Several aqueducts have been destroyed causing water distribution problems. It is reported that in Higüey, the main city on the east coast, that most houses lost their zinc sheet roofs. Electricity is out in most of the country. As one priority the government is clearing lines to restore power to the Red Cross building to support the relief operation and protect the Red Cross blood bank.

Most of the shelters are overcrowded and have inadequate facilities. A common sight is a shelter with 2,000 residents who share four toilets which are overflowing into the sleeping area. The lack of clean water is also a major cause of concern. The needs are enormous. Relief flights resumed on Friday, September 25.

HAITI

The death toll in Haiti may never be known with any precision due to the country's poor communications network and lack of infrastructure. By September 26, the official death toll stood at 87. Radio stations were reporting that a number of dead were swept away by rising flood waters. A number of people drowned on the island of La Gonave off Haiti's western coast. Incomplete estimates are that at least 4,500 people have lost their homes.

In November 1994, mudslides caused by Tropical Storm Gordon, a weaker system, took more than 800 lives. Deforestation and lack of maintenance have left drainage systems in Haitian cities choked with silt. The bidonville of Cite Soleil in Port-au-Prince was reportedly completely flooded. Significant damage has also been caused to Jacmel in the south. There is also severe damage to the banana crop.

The hurricane brought heavy rains to the north, northwest and central parts of the country, causing serious flooding and the swelling of the rivers. According to OCHA, some 7,000 people have been placed in temporary shelters. An international appeal has been made for assistance. The Direction of Civil Protection of the Ministry of Interior, through its Disaster Management Secretariat, is co-ordinating the relief operation. A co-ordination mechanism has been established with the assistance of the UNDP Office.

CUBA

Three people were electrocuted in Cuba following disruption of the electricity supply when Georges hit on September 25. A fourth person drowned. According to Cuban Civil Defence, an estimated 340,000 people were evacuated. Extensive flooding is reported in the eastern tip of Cuba with sea surges badly affecting low-lying areas.

ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA

Deaths	2
injured/hospitalised	5

Persons in shelters	125
Homeless	3,773
Houses destroyed	368
Houses damaged	1,508

Hurricane George swept through the Leeward Islands in the Eastern Caribbean, September 20/21. The eye of the hurricane passed over Antigua and produced winds in excess of 115 mph. Power and phones have been re-instated in most of St. John's, the capital. Worst affected communities are mainly coastal and include those of Five Islands, Bolands, Crabbs, Muck Pond and Liberta. Full power and telephone supply will be operational in three to four weeks and water a short time after. The Government is in the process of providing plastic sheeting for 1,000 homes in conjunction with CDERA.

ST. KITTS AND NEVIS

There were five confirmed deaths on St. Kitts which is the island most affected by Hurricane Georges in the Eastern Caribbean. 1,440 houses have been destroyed and a total of 7,200 were damaged. Neighbouring Nevis suffered relatively little damage by comparison. USAID/OFDA has made plastic sheeting available for 4,000 houses. Numbers in shelters have now dwindled to approximately 376 in 27 shelters.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

The Dominican Republic Red Cross/International Federation has been assigned the lead role in managing the relief and distribution process by the Government, key donor agencies such as USAID, and other NGOs. This is a major responsibility and demands considerable resources and co-ordination. The Red Cross holds daily briefing meetings with NGOs and has opened an operational centre.

Red Cross received the first aid flight from the US Government on Friday and immediately began distributing the 20,000 lbs of plastic sheeting to affected communities in Distrito National. The Red Cross has 24-hour reception teams positioned at both airports in Santo Domingo (commercial and military) and has the Dominican Army's soldiers and trucks at its disposal to unload the planes and move relief goods to the distribution points. Soldiers wear the Red Cross and do not carry weapons. The SUMA logistics management system is in place with support from PAHO. The US Army is making available a fleet of seven helicopters to the Red Cross to facilitate the relief effort in the most remote areas.

- ◆ 3,350 DR RC disaster workers have been mobilised, including a number of spontaneous volunteers;
- Received through Red Cross by Sunday: (incomplete list): 3 plane- loads of relief supplies: 491 boxes of plastic sheeting; six 3,000 gallon water tanks; 2,000 five gallon plastic buckets; water, juice, and other foodstuff;

Red Cross is managing the house-to-house and shelter census in co-ordination with other NGO's to sign up beneficiaries and direct them to distribution centres. As relief supplies start to arrive, emergency family parcels will be put together to include food and hygiene articles. Red Cross began distribution of hygiene articles to 4,212 shelter residents on Saturday. Red Cross is also developing a family notification system for one-way contacts with an immediate family member overseas.

The Regional Delegation has maintained the Caribbean Red Cross Societies website (www.caribredcross.org); damage and relief photos have been posted on it. The site has recorded

more than 132,000 visits over the last week; normal weekly average is 2,300 visits. More than 600 e.mail messages have been logged and responded to since the first Red Cross hurricane alert was issued on September 18; most have been queries in relation to Puerto Rico which have been referred to American Red Cross.

HAITI

The Federation office in Port-au-Prince has been reinforced with the arrival of two delegates skilled in logistics and relief. A meeting is scheduled today with Haitian Red Cross to work out a more detailed plan of action and collaboration with other NGOs.

Haitian Red Cross is assisting in a number of shelters and delivering supplies of water. It is targeting assistance at 50,000 people in the Port-au-Prince area. The Haitian Red Cross has been transferring the injured to hospital. An appeal has also been made locally for donations of food and clothing.

Little information is available as yet about the action being taken by the Haitian Red Cross in the provinces as communication is extremely difficult. An initial quantity of plastic sheeting was made available by ICRC for distribution.

ST. KITTS

Many Red Cross volunteers on St. Kitts suffered losses and, in the circumstances, a team of six volunteers from Antigua Red Cross, supported by a British RC logistician is being deployed for one week to assist in the relief and with distribution of 1,500 plastic sheetings from British Red Cross. A Federation delegate has already visited the island to support the needs assessment and met with the Prime Minister. Red Cross intends to continue food support to 80 hardship cases for 30 days and to assist in the restoration of 550 houses.

ANTIGUA

Red Cross has provided first aid and 2,000 meals to the shelters; 105 cots; 200 sets of toiletries; 100 comfort kits; water purification tablets. Distribution is also getting underway of 500 plastic sheets from British RC. There is a continuing need for food, water and housing rehabilitation materials which will be included in the forthcoming revised appeal.

Needs

A full revised appeal is being prepared for this week but the overwhelming needs continue to be those identified in the preliminary emergency appeal: plastic sheeting, drinking water, water purification tablets, food, hygiene articles, blankets, clothing, housing rehabilitation materials, clean-up materials, and carpentry tools. The operation is also in great need of cash to meet day-to-day running costs. Donors are urged to respond immediately.

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