

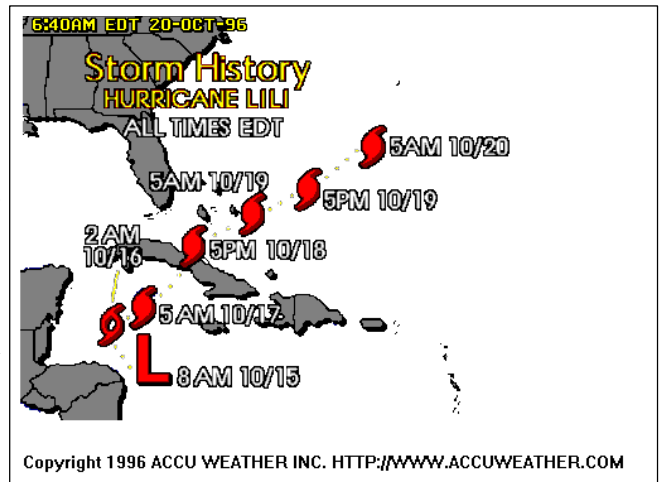
CUBA: HURRICANE LILI

Preliminary Appeal no: 16/96
21 October 1996

***THIS PRELIMINARY APPEAL SEEKS
CHF 2,000,000
TO ASSIST 100,000 BENEFICIARIES FOR SIX MONTHS***

Summary

On 17 October Hurricane Lili unleashed torrential rains on several Central American countries, causing particularly severe damage in western Cuba, where almost 200,000 people had to be evacuated from their homes. The Cuban Red Cross took part in the evacuations and is now assisting people in shelters. Needs assessments are still under way but it is already clear that evacuees urgently need basic emergency items and that later assistance will be needed with repairing damaged homes. The Red Cross Societies of the affected countries have so far been able to respond to the disaster with their own resources. However, in Cuba international assistance to the National Society will be necessary given the extent of the damage and expectations of action by Red Cross.



The Disaster

On 15 October, a Tropical Depression formed in the Caribbean Sea, turning into a hurricane-force storm - Hurricane Lili - two days later. Torrential rains from the hurricane lashed Central America on 17 October, killing at least five people in Nicaragua, four in Costa Rica and one in Honduras. The hurricane hit Cuba's tiny Isle of Youth on the same night. On 18 October it struck the Cuban provinces of Pinar del Río, La Havana, Havana City, Matanzas, Villa Clara, Cienfuegos, Santi Espíritu and Ciego de Avila, forcing large scale evacuation and causing severe damage to homes, public buildings, industry, agriculture and infrastructure in the western and central parts of the country. So far there have been no reports of dead or missing, but seven persons were injured.

Hurricane Lili passed over the islands of Northwest and Central Bahamas during the night of 18 to 19 October, damaging several houses and crops in Long Island. It is not considered to be a threat to Bermuda.

The Cuban Civil Defence reports a total of 191,936 people evacuated and 66,681 living in shelters (Pinar del Rio: 21,889 people evacuated; in public shelters, 4,255; Province of La Havana: 25,479 people evacuated; 11,347 people in shelters; Havana City: 58,455 people evacuated; 20,802 people in shelters; Isle of Youth: 6,511 people evacuated; 3,193 people in shelters; Matanzas: 21,776 people evacuated; 5,663 people in shelters; Villa Clara: 26,960 people evacuated; 10,205 in shelters; Cienfuegos: 16,529 people evacuated; 4,055 people in shelters; Sancti Espiritu: 13,771 people evacuated; 7,097 people in shelters; Ciego de Ávila: 566 people evacuated; 64 people in shelter).

A total of 22,066 houses have been damaged and 2,922 destroyed (Province of La Havana: 994 damaged; 68 destroyed; Havana City: 126 damaged; seven destroyed; Isle of Youth: 875 damaged; 103 destroyed; Matanzas: 643 damaged; 68 destroyed; Villa Clara: 2,192 damaged; 195 destroyed; Cienfuegos: 10,000 damaged; 2,000 destroyed; Sancti Espiritu: 2,307 damaged; 257 destroyed; Ciego de Avila: 1,205 damaged; 200 destroyed; Camaguey: 724 damaged; 24 destroyed).

Fifteen hospitals, 35 schools, over 100 farms and 236 industrial installations have suffered damage. In the province of Havana, the floods caused 20 major breaks in the communications and transport and cut off villages. In Villa Clara, 75 kms of road have been damaged. In all affected provinces, electricity lines have been cut and several hundred electricity poles brought down.

Thousands of hectares of agricultural land, bearing bananas, vegetables, fruit, rice, coffee, sugar and citrus fruits, have been badly damaged, including 7,500 tons of citrus fruits in Mantanas and 28,000 tons of rice in Sancti Espiritu. Food stock losses are likely to be higher once complete information becomes available.

The Response so far

Government Action •

The Civil Defence organised the evacuation of residents from low-lying coastal areas and provided shelters in schools and other public buildings. The Government has convened a meeting of donors and agencies for today, 21 October .

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action •

Although it has no electricity, only one phone line working and no communication between the National Headquarters (HQ) and the field, the Cuban Red Cross remains operational. All its staff and volunteers have been mobilised to help the evacuees, paying particular attention to needs of the elderly, handicapped and pregnant. Cuban Red Cross first aiders and water safety volunteers were prominent in assisting evacuations, and working in health centres and hospitals.

Havana airport is open again and the Regional Delegation sent two delegates to Cuba at the weekend to assist the National Society. A more detailed situation report is expected this week.

The American Red Cross Society and the Canadian Red Cross Society have already expressed interest in assisting the Cuban Red Cross.

Co-ordination •

All Red Cross work is closely co-ordinated with the Civil Defence.

The Needs to be met

Assessment of Needs •

A clearer picture of the situation is likely to emerge at the meeting of international agencies convened by the Government, in which the Cuban Red Cross and the International Federation will participate. However, it is already clear that impoverished families in both urban and rural parts of Cuba have sustained widespread losses, especially to housing, and that damage to industry and farmland will increase unemployment. Preliminary reports indicate severe food stock losses .

The Cuban Red Cross is being reinforced by one Delegate from the Regional Delegation in Kingston and one Delegate provided by the Colombian Red Cross Society to assess the needs of the most vulnerable in the hurricane hit areas. Further technical support can be accessed within the Caribbean by the Regional Delegation as necessary.

Immediate Needs •

The most immediate needs are those of the 66,681 people living in shelters in Cuba's western and central provinces. In the short term, the Red Cross, in conjunction with other agencies, will focus on providing food, clothing, soap, blankets and bedding materials for the evacuees, paying particular attention to the needs of the elderly, children, pregnant women and families left without employment.

Assistance may also be required to ensure safe drinking water, either in the form of water purification tablets or technical assistance from Federation water and sanitation experts, since the antiquated sewage system in Havana may have been seriously damaged.

Anticipated Later Needs •

Given the dire situation of Cuba's economy, it is expected that a long-term rehabilitation programme, targeting housing, schools, kindergartens and hospitals, will be necessary.

The Cuban Red Cross/Federation will assess the scale of assistance required to rehabilitate the damaged housing of low-income families, a programme expected to take six months. (Construction materials to the value of CHF 300,000 were distributed during last year's flood relief operation.)

Red Cross Objectives

- To continue first aid and health support to elderly, disabled and other evacuees from hospitals;
- to continue support to the homeless population in shelters;
- to assist with public health measures to prevent outbreaks of water-borne disease;
- to assess and meet short-term needs among the homeless for clothing, food, hygiene articles and bedding materials;
- to assess the extent of longer-term support needed from Red Cross for the rehabilitation of the housing of low-income families;

- to co-ordinate, and avoid duplication of effort, with other national and international agencies.

National Society/Federation Plan of Action

Emergency Phase: October 1996 •

(A more detailed plan of action and budget for the short-term emergency phase will be produced once needs have been verified and more complete information is available.)

The emergency phase will address the most pressing needs of people living in shelters and overcrowded homes, taking into account their reduced economic circumstances. Immediate needs will include kitchen utensils, bedding, clothing and hygiene articles.

A supplementary food parcel programme may be launched if food losses in the countryside prove to be a threat to the nutritional status of the population.

Another critical action area will be to ensure a safe drinking water supply for the population, given the already precarious state of the water and sanitation infrastructure in much of the country.

The Cuban Red Cross and the International Federation gained considerable experience last year in working in the affected areas of Pinar del Río, Villa Clara, Sancti Espiritu and Ciego de Ávila after floods hit these same western provinces in June 1995. That particular operation assisted almost 10,000 people in 18 towns and villages.

The Federation will also assess measures required to boost the operational capacity of the Cuban Red Cross, particularly in the areas of logistics, communications and relief training of RC volunteers.

Phase Two: November 1996 - March 1997 •

Longer-term assistance will concentrate on helping people to return their homes and carry out repairs. A specific needs assessment will be required. The plight of those whose homes have been completely destroyed will have to be dealt with separately .

Project delegation of the rehabilitation phase to a Participating National Society will be considered; interested National Societies should contact the Americas Department.

Capacity of the National Society •

While the Cuban Red Cross adequately fulfilled its obligations to the beneficiaries of last year's flood relief operation there were severe local limitations in resources, delays in the procurement process and local delays in Havana port. These issues must be addressed quickly to facilitate implementation of this current operation. The Cuban Red Cross disaster response structure needs to be improved through clearer assignment of tasks, better information flows and the creation of a central disaster-response team.

The Cuban Red Cross was able to assign 1,119 volunteers and employees at central, provincial and municipal levels to last year's relief operation. This time, all 5,161 staff and much of its 18,750 membership have been mobilised.

The Cuban Red Cross has six warehouses and offices in Havana, Villa Clara, Ciego de Avila, Sancti Espiritu, Guantanamo and Pinar del Rio. It has 1,300 ambulances and five administrative vehicles and its own radio-communications network, although this was badly affected by Hurricane Lili. The NS also runs three water rescue training centres.

Present Capacity of the Federation in Cuba •

For much of the past year, the Caribbean Regional Delegation has had a delegate paying regular visits to Cuba to support Red Cross actions in the flooded western provinces; to support an ECHO-funded distribution of medical supplies in Guantanamo province where a German RC delegate was based full-time; and to discuss various development issues. The Cuban RC is well integrated in the Federation's regional activities.

The two Federation delegates now in Havana will have the use of a German RC vehicle purchased for the Guantanamo operation. Depending on donor response to the appeal, this presence will be further bolstered by the addition of at least one more relief delegate and a finance/ administration delegate.

Evaluation •

An evaluation will be carried out at the end of the operation.

Immediate action

Besides the despatch of two Delegates, the Federation is releasing funds from the Disaster Relief Emergency Fund.

Budget summary

CHF 750,000 provisionally earmarked for immediate needs of homeless (household items and food); CHF one million provisionally earmarked for housing repair; CHF 250,000 to cover additional needs and support costs. A more detailed budget will be presented as soon as possible.

Conclusion

When additional information is received from the disaster areas in the next few days, this preliminary appeal will be revised accordingly. Meanwhile, a rapid and generous response will allow disaster relief action to continue effectively in the worst-hit areas. One factor in the delays experienced in last year's flood relief operation was the relatively slow in-flow of funds. Donors are urged to pledge cash to the Secretariat in Geneva, as all relief goods needed are available in the region.

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