

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

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC & HAITI: FLOODS

20 September 2004

The Federation's mission is to improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity. It is the world's largest humanitarian organization and its millions of volunteers are active in over 181 countries.

In Brief

This Information Bulletin (no. 01/2004) is being issued based on the needs described below reflecting the information available at this time. CHF 100,000 has been allocated from the Federation's Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF). Based on further updates and details from assessment reports, or should the situation deteriorate, the Federation may consider international support through an Emergency Appeal.

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The Situation

Tropical Storm Jeanne caused more than 550 deaths in Haiti when it brought flooding and landslides to the impoverished country. Another 11 people were killed in the Dominican Republic. Tropical Storm Jeanne was the tenth named storm of the Atlantic hurricane season, and became the sixth hurricane when it strengthened to a category 1 hurricane after passing over Puerto Rico on Thursday, 16 September. Hurricane Jeanne hit the east coast of the Dominican Republic later on Thursday and weakened slightly to a powerful tropical storm as it moved across the island of Hispaniola.

Tropical Storm Jeanne moved slowly northwest across the Dominican Republic Thursday and Friday, causing extensive damage. In the town of San Pedro de Macorís, on the south coast of the country, thousands of people were stranded on the rooftops of their submerged homes after the River Soco, which links the Provinces of San Pedro de Macorís and La Romana, burst its banks. On Thursday night, the storm stalled for some ten hours over

the town of Samaná on the north coast of the country, dumping heavy rains and destroying homes. Heavy flooding was also reported in the provinces of Duarte and Sanchez Ramirez in the north of the country, two provinces that were hit hard by the floods that occurred in Hispaniola in May.

According to the Dominican Red Cross (DRC), more than 8 thousand people have been evacuated from their homes and some 14 thousand people have been affected by the floods to date. The National Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) reports that 165 shelters have been established throughout the country, which are housing approximately 4,000 people. Additionally, it is estimated that 10,000 people nationwide have taken shelter with family and friends. In the Bajo Yuna region, rising water levels and strong winds downed electricity polls and damaged crops. In El Seibo and Samaná Provinces, 40 per cent of the electricity services were reported to have been damaged. In Higüey (La Altagracia) and in Samaná, roads have been affected by floods and landslides, and in Samaná, telephone communications are not functioning.

In Haiti, Tropical Storm Jeanne caused flooding and death in the northern half of the country after heavy downpours of rain drenched the area on Friday and Saturday, 17 and 18 September. At least 300 people have been confirmed dead in Gonaïves alone, and many more have been left homeless. The Departments affected include l'Artibonite, Plateau Central, Sud and the Nord-Ouest. The country's interim Prime Minister has declared three days of national mourning.



The northern Haitian city of Gonaïves is seen flooded on 19 September 2004 after Tropical Storm Jeanne passed through. More than 500 people died in flooding and mudslides triggered by Jeanne according to aid workers who said half of Gonaïves was still underwater.

Photo Courtesy of Reuters

The town of Gonaïves in l'Artibonite has been the hardest hit. According to United Nations representatives in Haiti, there were 250 bodies in the Gonaïves hospital morgue, and there were unconfirmed reports of another 150 dead elsewhere in the city. Approximately 80 percent of Gonaïves' urban population of 100,000 people have been affected by the floods. Houses in the city were damaged and hundreds of residents were forced to take refuge on rooftops to escape the rising flood waters. Crops and livestock have also been washed away. An additional 47 deaths were confirmed in Port de Paix, as well as 8 more in other parts of the country. Almost 400 wounded have been treated by Médecins sans Frontières and Argentine peacekeepers working in the country as part of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH).

Security in the area remains precarious and there are reports that the Haitian National Police have deserted. Road links are being re-established by heavy machinery dispatched from Saint Marc. It is expected that the road from Port-au-Prince to Cap Haitien will be opened by Tuesday, 21 September. The most urgent needs are food, shelter, potable water and medical assistance. At present, there are no reliable figures as to the number of houses destroyed or people affected.

On Saturday 18 September, Tropical Storm Jeanne also affected the south eastern Bahamas and Turks and Caicos, but no major damages were reported. Jeanne later regained hurricane strength as it moved out into the open ocean, but there is no immediate threat to land.

Red Cross and Red Crescent action

In the Dominican Republic, the Dominican Red Cross has been meeting regularly with the National Emergency Operations Centre to assess the situation and formulate a response. The Red Cross is also working with the EOC at the provincial level to coordinate activities and gather information.

On Saturday, 18 September the DRC, in conjunction with the Federation and Partner National Societies working in the country, deployed six damage and needs assessment teams to the affected areas. Representatives of the Dominican Red Cross, the American Red Cross, the Netherlands Red Cross and the Spanish Red Cross, together with the Federation, took part in these assessments. All areas report high flood levels and severe damage to housing. In addition, throughout the affected areas crops were destroyed, in particular banana, coconut, cassava and pumpkin crops, which represent an important source of local income.

Reports from Puerto Plata and Cabarete, located in the north of the country, state that all people staying in shelters or with friends or family have now returned to their homes. In Gaspar Hernández, also in the north, 300 people of a total population of 3,000 have been affected. The DRC has supported search and rescue activities, registration of the affected population and food distributions in these areas.

In the central provinces of Duarte and Sanchez Ramirez, and the central coast province of Maria Trinidad Sanchez, the assessment team found a very high level of affectation. Some of the flooded areas included the Bajo Yuna region that was also affected by the flooding in May. These provinces are without electricity or access to water. As in other parts of the country, crops in this region were seriously damaged. In San Jose de Matanzas, 287 houses were affected, while in Duarte 15 people were evacuated to a nearby shelter.

The Red Cross assessment team in the provinces of San Pedro de Macoris and La Romana reports that there was significant damage when the River Soco overflowed. Some 300 houses have been affected and there is no electricity, phone access or water. There is one shelter in the area housing 15 people. The Red Cross in this area is supporting the local government with distributions of clothes, prepared food and water. The Red Cross is also regularly participating in local EOC meetings.

The final Red Cross assessment team took place in Babaro, Alta Gracia and Higüey. The assessment team reports that there are 1,058 people staying in 16 shelters. Another 1,500 people are staying with friends or family. A total of 142 houses were severely damaged, while another 414 were also seriously affected. The Red Cross in this eastern region of the country, which was the first hit by the storm, participated in the alert and evacuation phase leading up to and during the disaster. Red Cross doctors are now providing assistance to affected persons. The Red Cross psychosocial support team is also providing support at the shelters.

According to the Red Cross assessments, the needs in all affected areas are for drinking water, roofing supplies, agricultural support, non-food items and tools.

In Haiti, the Federation, through its office in Cap Haïtien, is coordinating with OXFAM. On 16 September, the ICRC, OXFAM and the Haitian National Red Cross Society regional branch initiated an awareness campaign amongst those living along the coast, urging them to move inland. An aerial survey of Gonaïves and Cap Haïtien took place on Saturday, 19 September with the participation of the Haitian National Red Cross Society (HNRCS), OCHA, OXFAM and the French Red Cross.

The Federation has made available to the Haitian National Red Cross Society the following stocks of relief items stored in Port au Prince: 2,550 hygiene kits, 137 family tents, 355 (4x6m) sheets of plastic sheeting, 455 body bags. Trucks have been loaded at the Haitian Red Cross warehouse and dispatched to Gonaïves. The body bags were sent to the airport to be airlifted by the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti. The Federation, through the Pan American Disaster Response Unit, is also planning to ship plastic sheeting, hygiene kits and kitchen sets to Port-au-Prince by cargo plane as soon as possible.

In Gonaïves, the Ministry of Agriculture, with Red Cross involvement, is trucking water between St. Marc and Gonaïves for distribution. The regional Red Cross branch building in l'Artibonite has been flooded and most local volunteers have themselves been affected by the floods. In Port de Paix, a member of the Haitian National Red Cross Society and a member of the French Red Cross participated in a joint assessment of the area. The water and sanitation delegate working in Mapou following the floods in May was also deployed to Port-au-Prince to join the assessment team. Further assessments will be needed in order to have a more complete picture of the damages and needs in Haiti. In addition, a Red Cross meeting was held at the HNRCS headquarters in Port-au-Prince on 20 September to look at further actions to be taken.

The Federation is mobilizing a Field Assessment and Coordination (FACT) team and health and water and sanitation assessments will begin by members of the team as of tomorrow, 21 September. An aerial survey will take place by helicopter tomorrow with the participation of the ICRC, the Federation, the Red Cross branch of Gonaïves and OXFAM. One of the aims of the survey is to determine whether there is a need to deploy a water and sanitation emergency response unit.

The Federation has released CHF 100,000 from its Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) to assist those affected by Tropical Storm Jeanne in the Dominican Republic and Haiti.

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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