

# ***CARIBBEAN: HURRICANE GEORGES***

*21 September 1998*

## ***The Disaster***

The islands of the north-east Caribbean Sea from Dominica northward and westward to Puerto Rico are bearing the full brunt of Hurricane Georges which started to pound the region yesterday with maximum sustained winds of 115 mph/185 km/hr and higher gusts. A hurricane watch is in effect for the Dominican Republic. A tropical storm warning and a hurricane watch remain in effect from Martinique southward to St. Lucia.

The Category Three to Four Hurricane poses a serious threat to life and property in the region and the Red Cross has been assisting with evacuations and helping local populations to get prepared since Friday. Needs assessments are expected to get underway today once dawn breaks and conditions have eased sufficiently to allow Red Cross staff and volunteers to move around safely. Significant damage is expected to housing, crops, fishing and tourist facilities. Rainfall totals of five to ten inches, locally higher over mountainous terrain, are likely near the path of Georges. Storm surge flooding of four to seven feet above normal tide levels accompanied by large and dangerous waves are also expected.

Hurricane shelters in Antigua, Montserrat, Dominica, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Maarten and Guadeloupe were packed to capacity during the night. Many thousands of families are taking shelter in their basements. Government officials throughout the region warned that the Georges could cause the worst damage in many years. Church services in many islands were cut short yesterday so the churches could be converted to hurricane shelters.

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

### **REGIONAL DELEGATION**

The International Federation's Regional Delegation in Santo Domingo and National Societies from the Eastern Caribbean to the Dominican Republic have been on high alert since Friday. The Regional Delegation has been in regular contact with those islands along the storm's forecast path.

A press release with hurricane preparedness tips was prepared and released Friday in both English and Spanish. In anticipation of any relief operation for the island of Hispaniola (Haiti and Dominican Republic), additional warehouse space is being cleared. Federation vehicles have been inspected and fuelled. Radio equipment is being tested.

The Regional Delegation has also re-issued hurricane relief advertisements which were prepared for and distributed to National Societies and overseas branches in January this year. Delegates are on stand-by to provide technical support to National Societies, particularly in needs assessment.

Further information can be gathered from the Caribbean Red Cross web site: [www.caribredcross.org](http://www.caribredcross.org).

### **ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA**

Red Cross is stocked and prepared to provide feeding for the public during the first 72 hours of the disaster. It will pay particular attention to the needs of over 1,000 Montserratians displaced by the on-going volcanic eruption on the island west of Antigua. Arrangements are in place for water to be airlifted from Martinique today or as soon as the airport re-opens. Red Cross volunteers are mobilised to provide first aid assistance to hospitals and shelters. Red Cross also provided support to fishermen seeking to secure their boats over the weekend. Food and hardware stores were open on Sunday to allow last-minute purchases of food and timber for boarding up property.

### **BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS**

The centre of the storm is forecast to move just south of BVI later today. The Red Cross is supporting the government information office in issuing hurricane preparedness information to the public. The BVI Red Cross has delivered essential food supplies to homes for the elderly and is also helping to cater for food needs in the emergency shelters. First aid assistance will also be provided.

### **CUBA**

The Cuban Red Cross is in a high state of preparedness for any possible strike by Hurricane Georges later this week.

### **DOMINICA**

The well-established Red Cross disaster preparedness programme on the island is providing the Red Cross with an island-wide network for disseminating warnings to vulnerable communities through disaster committees. Red Cross is on stand-by to assist in shelters and provide first aid. Emergency food distribution will also be available.

### **DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

The Red Cross issued an advisory to the public through the media urging preparedness for a possible strike early this week. The Red Cross blood bank has been put on alert. The National Red Cross emergency team is co-ordinating activities with branches and has met and agreed to provide first aid during the disaster and to support the civil defence in managing the shelters and sanitation issues. A response team is also being organised to co-ordinate relief distribution and is co-operating with other organisations for the immediate emergency needs following the disaster. The Red Cross is prepared to provide initial damage assessment within the first eight hours.

### **HAITI**

The Haitian Red Cross, particularly in the north of the country, is now on alert for any possible strike by Georges this week. The Federation office in Port-au-Prince has been mobilised to provide all necessary support. A technical support team from the Dominican Republic Red Cross is also available to support the Haitian Red Cross in the event of need.

## **MONTSEERRAT**

Shelters have been opened in schools and churches and the Red Cross will provide first aid assistance as necessary. The new Red Cross-built Golden Years Home for the Elderly is hurricane proof but normal precautions have been taken, including the boarding up of windows. The government has evacuated 50 wooden homes in unprotected locations. There is concern that some residents of shelters built as a result of the three-year long volcanic activity were unwilling to leave these for safer structures.

## **ST. KITTS AND NEVIS**

The Red Cross is prepared to provide first aid assistance and distribution of existing relief supplies. It is also providing direct support to the emergency shelters.

## *Needs*

Needs assessments have not yet taken place. However, in light of the hurricane's strength and Red Cross experience of the two record-breaking hurricane seasons of 1995 and 1996, needs will include plastic sheeting, water purification tablets, fresh water, food and housing repair materials such as zinc sheets. Donors should be on stand-by to meet these and other possible needs if an emergency appeal is launched.

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