

Joint statement
by the Haiti Red Cross Society, the International Federation of Red Cross and
Red Crescent Societies and the International Committee of the Red Cross
on action taken by the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in
Haiti in the aftermath of Hurricane Matthew

On 4 October of this year, Hurricane Matthew struck Haiti, devastating 25% of its territory. The southern peninsula was the hardest hit, particularly the Sud and Grand-Anse departments. Considerable damage was also reported in the departments of Nippes, Sud-Est, Ouest and Nord-Ouest.

Packing winds of up to 235 km/hour, the hurricane (Category 4) left many dead and injured and caused significant population displacements and extensive flooding and damage. Official figures published by the authorities put the death toll at 546, with 128 missing and 439 injured. A total of around one and a half million people have been affected, with 750,000 of them requiring humanitarian assistance. It is difficult, at present, to obtain a full picture of needs, as assessments are still in progress in some areas.

In the face of this humanitarian emergency situation, the authorities decided to postpone the presidential elections, originally scheduled for 9 October. The Haitian government has appealed to the international community to provide aid in a coordinated way and in a different manner from 2010, without, however, declaring a state of emergency.

The main humanitarian concerns are compounded by pre-existing vulnerabilities in the country, including the threat of a cholera epidemic and food insecurity:

- ✓ The increase in the number of cholera cases is due to lack of access to safe drinking water and the poor condition of water supply and sanitation infrastructure. The flooding has increased not only the risk of a cholera epidemic, but also the risk of the spread of other vector- and water-borne diseases.
- ✓ Food insecurity has been exacerbated by the extensive damage caused to cropland, forest plantations and livestock (losses of between 80% and 100%, depending on the area).

Three important factors could have an impact on the organization of humanitarian response:

- ✓ even greater difficulties in reaching some communities;
- ✓ further deterioration of safety conditions for the deployment of response teams and the distribution of aid;
- ✓ difficulties in coordinating activities, owing to the large number of actors involved on the ground.

ACTION BY THE MOVEMENT

When the disaster alert was triggered, the Haiti Red Cross Society adapted its emergency plan according to the projections issued by the public authorities and submitted it to the partners of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (Movement). With its 85 years' experience providing humanitarian services, it acted swiftly and proactively, mobilizing its volunteers and multidisciplinary personnel and organizing the response. Several operational teams were already deployed in Cayes, Grand-Anse and Nord-Ouest before the hurricane struck the area.

Movement partners present in Haiti mobilized efforts to distribute relief supplies, optimize available logistics capabilities and assess the damage in the geographic areas and fields of activity that they were familiar with. Eight Participating National Societies (specifically those of Germany, United States, Canada, Spain, France, Italy, Netherlands and Switzerland) are currently playing a very active role in the field. The Dominican Red Cross is also supporting the Movement's efforts, by making human, technical and material resources available.

Non-food relief items were initially distributed, until a more accurate picture of needs could be gained. A Field Assessment Coordination Team (FACT), eight Regional Intervention Teams (RITs) and four Emergency Response Units (ERUs) have so far been sent to Haiti to support Haiti Red Cross Society operations. On 6 October, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (International Federation) issued a preliminary emergency appeal for 6.8 million Swiss francs to enable the Haiti Red Cross Society to provide assistance in the affected areas.

While the Movement's action in Haiti focuses essentially on basic areas (water, food, shelter, health and sanitation), it also aims to strengthen the response capacity of the Haiti Red Cross Society. The work of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is centred on detention, with a view to supporting the Haitian authorities in providing an appropriate response to the needs of detainees affected by the disaster, and on restoring family links, including by means of its website www.familylinks.icrc.org, which allow families to register missing loved ones and facilitates searches by Haiti Red Cross Society specialists.

Priorities for the medium and long term can be defined once the assessment missions currently in progress have been completed.

COORDINATION OF MOVEMENT OPERATIONS

The Movement's operations are coordinated in the wider context of the National Disaster Risk Management System (SNGRD). The Haiti Red Cross Society forms part of the mechanisms put in place by local, regional and national authorities and cooperates closely with the Civil Defence Department.

The Movement's operations are, and will continue to be, guided by the vision and priorities established in the Haiti Red Cross Society's Strategic Plan 2016–2020.

In accordance with the recommendations set out in the resolution adopted by the Council of Delegates in December 2015 on strengthening Movement coordination and cooperation, the president of the Haiti Red Cross Society, the head of the International Federation Country Cluster and the head of the ICRC delegation met at a mini-summit on 10 October to determine the Movement's main courses of action. Given the environment in which it will be operating, the decisions taken focused mainly on the management of external relations, security, communications and internal coordination with the Movement.

The Movement's coordination arrangements in Haiti, specified in the tripartite agreement concluded on 8 April 2016, have been adapted to the emergency situation. In addition to the strategic direction meeting, the operational and technical coordination levels established in the agreements have also been activated, with the aim of keeping the arrangements simple and flexible. These coordination mechanisms support the core role of the Haiti Red Cross Society as auxiliary to the public authorities in the humanitarian field. The Movement's overall response is coordinated by the Haiti Red Cross Society and the International Federation, with the support of the ICRC.

Recalling that Haiti was chosen in 2016 as the context for the strengthening of Movement coordination and cooperation in the Americas region, the Haiti Red Cross Society, the

International Federation and the ICRC reaffirm their commitment to optimize the Movement's humanitarian action in this emergency operation.

On behalf of the Movement, we express our unwavering solidarity and confirm our commitment to supporting the Haitian people affected by this disaster.

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