

AmericasRelief Team

NEWS REPORT

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www.americasrelief.org

AmericasRelief Team Replies to U.N. and OAS Concerns for Better Coordination of Disaster Relief to the Caribbean Basin

BACKGROUND

Four major hurricanes-Ivan, Jeanne, Francis and Charley-plowed through the Caribbean region last year, causing an estimated \$7 billion in damage, mostly in Jamaica, Grenada, Cuba, the Bahamas, the Dominican Republic and the Cayman Islands.

On June 1st, U.N. humanitarian chief Jan Egeland said that North America and Europe should prepare to give more disaster aid to the Caribbean region, which hurricane forecasters say could be especially active. "2005 could be worse than 2004, when we lost more than 5,000 lives in Haiti alone," Egeland said of the string of powerful hurricanes and storms that pummeled the region last year.

In the Cayman Islands, Ivan destroyed 70 percent of the buildings in Grand Cayman. In Grenada, only 170 of 10,000 destroyed homes have been rebuilt. And in Haiti, floods killed most of the people when Jeanne struck as a tropical storm. With more than 98 percent of its forest gone, Haiti has no top soil to hold rain.

At a recent Organization of American States' gathering in Fort Lauderdale, Caribbean leaders listed "sketchy disaster preparedness" as one of their main concerns.

AmericasRelief Team Replies

AmericasRelief Team members believe that the main problem regarding disaster aid in the Caribbean region is not a lack of quantity, but an existing logistics bottleneck which keeps the relief aid from getting to the people with the greatest needs.

During the 2005 hurricane season the Caribbean region received massive relief efforts, but much of the aid becomes stacked up at collection centers and the process keeps stopping. The net result was that many of the victims did not get desperately needed food, water and medical supplies.

In response, Americas Relief Team, made up of various Florida-based companies and humanitarian organizations, collaborated to form a public-private consortium to help Latin America and Caribbean countries in time of crisis and disasters, in the delivery of relief supplies at little or no cost. Team members have contacts with governmental and non-governmental institutions in the affected countries and helped identify the most urgent relief aid needs.

By the end of last year's hurricane season, the Americas Relief Team effort brought together more than 50 companies to address the issues of disaster response, and donated, processed, shipped and distributed more than \$18 million to those with the greatest needs, garnering them kudos from Major General Richard Mentemeyer of the US Southern Command, and Ambassador Charles E. Cobb, Chairman of Florida-FTAA. Even Governor Jeb Bush saluted the effort.

Two exemplary efforts of Americas Relief Team's Florida-based member corporations taking independent actions to help alleviate the relief distribution problems, and provide additional assistance to our friends in the Caribbean, are Carnival Cruise Lines pre-hurricane season workshops to help train the Caribbean Consular Corps on best practices for hurricane preparedness, and FedEx Latin America's 747 provided to Miami-Dade County to bring assistance and relief supplies to the disaster victims in Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

Florida disaster professionals can help our Caribbean neighbors increase institutional capacity by following the lead of successful programs, such as The Florida Association for Volunteer Action in the Caribbean and the Americas' (FAVACA) disaster preparedness training of Caribbean agencies and organizations. Americas Relief Team member FAVACA uses Florida experts to help with post-trauma counseling, emergency management plan development, damage assessment, and other capacity building expertise.

Another way to help remove the relief aid distribution bottleneck is to help integrate local private sector partners. A project by Americas Relief Team member and Washington DC-based, The Pan American Development Foundation helps empower the American Chambers of Commerce in Latin America and the Caribbean by assisting them in establishing a Disaster Committee with a disaster preparedness, mitigation, and response protocol. The initiative is sponsored by the Office of US Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA).

The federal government, private corporations, and relief organizations can also help develop better linkages to leverage greater impact for resources available for disaster relief. To that end, Americas Relief Team has introduced a program to coordinate relief cargo space available from air and ocean cargo carriers operating in the Caribbean, but much more needs to be done.

For more information on how you can be involved or to learn more about Americas Relief Team, please visit www.americasrelief.org.

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