

# Alert

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Haiti – No. 37/2010

## Tropical Storm Tomas threatens Haiti

Geneva, November 4, 2010

### 1. Brief description of the emergency

Tropical Storm Tomas, which has already affected the Windward Islands of St Lucia and St Vincent, is expected to reach Haiti, possibly in the form of a Category 1 hurricane. Projections from the National Hurricane Center in Florida (<http://www.nhc.noaa.gov/>) indicate it will reach the western tip of Haiti's southern peninsula on the morning of Friday November 5th and continue north-east towards the Ouest (Port-au-Prince) and Artibonite departments before passing over the northern region during the night of November 5th. Strong winds and rains are already expected on Thursday, according to Haiti's National Meteorological Center (<http://www.meteo-haiti.gouv.ht/>). A red alert (hurricane warning) has been declared for the whole Haitian territory from 2<sup>nd</sup> November onward.

### 2. Potential Impact

Storm surges and flooding are expected along the southern coast, as well as the Gulf of Gonâve. Discussions are under way to assess the possibility of evacuating the coastal population.

The Department for Civil Protection (DPC) is taking the lead on contingency planning and disaster preparedness, with the support of the UN and NGO community which are all mobilising staff and replenishing stocks. Emergency Operation Centres in the western and Artibonite departments, as well as the National Emergency Operation Center, have been mobilised.

The situation is worrying for the 1.3 million people still homeless after the January 12 earthquake and living in camps in Port-au-Prince, Leogane and Jacmel. Camps can be expected to be flooded, and shelter and water, sanitation and hygiene materials badly damaged.

The health cluster is anticipating that the cholera epidemic, which is now active in the North, Northwest, Northeast, West, Artibonite and Central departments, may spread further due to flooding and population movement provoked by Tropical Storm Tomas.

### 3. National and international response

An emergency meeting was convened on November 2 between President Preval, Prime Minister Bellerive and UN representatives.

The national authorities and the international community are preparing for Tomas based on a scenario of 100,000 affected families (500,000 people). The DPC has advised people in camps to leave and seek refuge with parents, friends etc. The Ministry of Education announced that schools would be closed on Thursday and Friday.

The Government of Haiti, together with the Camp Coordination/Camp management cluster and NGOs working in camps, is focusing on informing the camp population about the need to collect belongings, secure tents, and find refuge with family and neighbours. SMS text messages have been sent on major mobile phone networks and television and radio spots are being broadcasted. Materials to be distributed have been pre-positioned. The major gap is the lack of safe public infrastructure that people could use as shelter, in particular in Port-au-Prince and Leogane. The shelter cluster is coordinating mitigation work in the camps. A shortage of emergency material is expected after the storm.

Camp committees in particular are being made aware of the upcoming storm so they can monitor the situation and assist households.

The Ministry of Health, along with the health cluster, is projecting a worsening of cholera transmission, and is therefore planning for more material, more medical staff and more prevention messages. Non-food items and water purification stocks need to be replenished after high use in response to the cholera outbreak.

UN OCHA has shared the DPC assessment form to be used by agencies, and a mailing list has been put in place to keep interested parties informed of damage and needs assessment results.

The latest figures on the Cholera outbreak reveal that 442 people have died and 6,742 have been hospitalised.

#### **4. ACT Alliance response**

Finn Church Aid (FCA) is clearing workplaces (school reconstruction sites) and securing tools, along with reconstituting stocks of aquatabs and oral rehydration salts NCA is securing latrines and showers in the camps. In Jacmel (South-East Department) DKH has identified (together with the local authorities and a consortium of NGOs and UN agencies) two school sites where people can take refuge. It has been doing awareness training with the camp committees and will accompany the evacuation process of camps Wolf I and III in Jacmel, which represent 1500 people. LWF has held awareness raising meetings in the Nerette and Petion-Ville camps. LWF has stocks of tents and plastic sheeting. Most ACT members are replenishing stocks, such as hygiene kits and aquatabs. Chlorox and oral rehydration salts are also on the list as the cholera epidemic might spread following the tropical storm. FCA will distribute tarpaulins as well as Aquatabs and oral rehydration salts after the passage of Tomas, using for this purpose its network of schools to reach urban and rural communities.

Norwegian Church Aid has two people on standby in Norway who can come within a week if needed. NCA is planning repair work to damaged sanitation facilities (latrines, handwashing systems, showers) and water provision systems, if necessary, in the camps where it works. The cleaning of camps and pumping of flooded areas, via camp manager organisations, are also planned.

Church World Service is pre-positioning tarpaulins and hygiene kits with their partners. They have been preparing for the hurricane season and have over 10,000 tarps and 10,000 hygiene kits in stock.

Christian Aid, in conjunction with its partners, is actively working to prepare for the tropical storm with local governments and communities, evacuating people, prepositioning stocks, consolidating homes, supplying food and water.

ACT Alliance is working throughout the country through its large number of members and partners in Haiti.

Other ACT members, such as ICCO, are monitoring the situation with their partners and are ready to provide support should the situation require it. Awareness-raising, including the need for protection and stocks, must also be made with staff.

#### **5. Planned activities**

All ACT member organisations are monitoring the situation and will decide whether to close offices for part of Thursday and all of Friday. Assessments are expected to start as soon as the rain ends, probably Sunday. In the November 3 meetings, ACT members informed each other of expertise and resources they could share with others while doing assessments. The need to issue an ACT appeal will be assessed based on the extent of the damage.

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**Thank you for your attention.**