

This report was issued by OCHA Fiji and the OCHA Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific

I. HIGHLIGHTS/KEY PRIORITIES

- **Cook Islands were hit by Tropical Cyclone Pat in the early hours of 10 February (Cook Islands time), and Aitutaki island in the Southern Cook was seriously damaged**
- **The result of rapid assessments suggests 68 houses were totally destroyed and people are displaced. Among them, 60% are living in the public facilities. In addition, 436 houses are either seriously or partly damaged. These households need immediate support in terms of shelter, water and others**
- **New Zealand Defense Force (NZDF) flight C-130 has arrived in Aitutaki this afternoon carrying various relief items which are urgently needed by affected population**
- **A coordination mechanism is put in place both at Aitutaki and Rarotonga. A daily coordination meeting is held at both locations to facilitate coordinate response activities**

II. Situation Overview

Tropical Cyclone Pat, Category 3, hit the Southern Cook Islands in the early hours of 10 February (Cook Islands time), and Aitutaki island was seriously hit, with major infrastructural damage, although the airport, wharf and hospital only sustained minimal damage. At its height Tropical Cyclone Pat was classified as a category 3 cyclone bringing destructive wind gusts of over 100 knots. Up to this moment no particular information of damages was received from other Southern Cook Islands at this stage.

On 10 February (Cook Islands time), the Prime Minister declared a State of Disaster for Aitutaki Island (population 1,671, 580 households). An Emergency Operation Centre (EOC) on the island was immediately activated and an assessment team composed of government and Red Cross staff was dispatched to the island on the same day.

A rapid assessment by Red Cross, Ministry of Health and Ministry of Infrastructure and Planning has been completed and the results of health and education assessment are already available. The assessment results by Red Cross and Ministry of Infrastructure and Planning will be ready by tomorrow. The Cook Islands Red Cross (CIRC) assessment suggests 68 houses were totally destroyed, leaving residents displaced while other 436 houses were also seriously or partly damaged.

Assessment information currently available suggests that the priority needs include emergency and transitional shelters, access to drinking waters, restoration of electricity and possibly food.

New Zealand received a formal request for assistance from Cook Islands on 14 February. The United Nations also received an official request for support from the Cook Islands Government on 12 February.

A C-130 (New Zealand Defense Force flight) arrived in Aitutaki on 15 February with various relief items such as family tents, generators, water containers, tarpaulins and chainsaw packs. This also carries New Zealand Defense Force personnel with technical expertise such as electricians, engineers and plumbers. Distribution of relief items will be conducted shortly after they are unloaded according to the assessment information.

III. Humanitarian Needs and Response

Debris/Waste management

- The affected community has already started cleaning up of debris but it still requires additional resources and tools. The arrival of chainsaws and other tools with C-130 is expected to facilitate clean up of debris.

- Disposing of roofing irons is a concern. Cook Islands are still in the cyclone season and it will be very hazardous if another cyclone hit the island before these debris are properly disposed of.

Initial Assessment

- The rapid assessment by the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, Red Cross and Ministry of Infrastructure and Planning was completed yesterday evening (12 Feb).
- The results of assessment conducted by Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education are already available. The key findings of this assessment are included below.
- The assessment results from the Red Cross and Ministry of Infrastructure and Planning are expected to be ready by tomorrow.

Logistics

- The NZDF C-130 Hercules arrived in Aitutaki today, delivering various relief goods, the majority of which will be distributed by Cook Islands Red Cross (CIRC). The C-130 departed Rarotonga at approximately 1330 local time and arrived in Aitutaki at 1420 local time.
- NZDF engineers, electricians and a plumber were on board and remain on the island to assist in the restoration of power and water.
- Further C-130 flights are scheduled tomorrow in order to deliver further relief supplies, and possibly fuel and heavy machinery such as bobcats and front loaders, as requested by Cook Islands Government.
- 80% of main grid electricity has been restored, but only 10% of individual homes are reconnected to electricity due to safety verification.

Education

- There are 4 schools on the island (1 secondary and 3 primary). One school building of the Seventh Day Adventist church (SDA) primary school has totally collapsed, and another building of the same school is also severely damaged. Araura College with 221 students and a primary school with 130 students also suffers structural damage. Vaitau School with 74 students is also partly damaged and they accommodate evacuees.
- The SDA School started its classes today using the principal's house and a factory space. Other schools have not started yet.
- An education assessment was conducted by Ministry of Education (MOE) officers on 11 February, and the findings suggest that it requires infrastructure rehabilitation, restoration of water, electricity and communications, replacement of basic school equipment and counseling of students and teachers. The MOE needs to develop a strategy for the SDA School which was totally destroyed whether to relocate, temporarily merge with other school or other options.
- The Ministry of Education is currently collecting more in depth information on the damages to school equipment and facilities such as library books, teaching materials, computers etc so that they can ask for support.
- A numbers of teachers have lost their houses or have had their houses damaged, and need support so that they can return to schools for teaching.

Emergency Shelter/Non Food Items (NFIs)

- CIRC distributed 100 tarpaulins on 14 February and other relief items delivered by C-130 will be also delivered to the affected population including additional tarpaulins and family tents. The size of family tents delivered by C-130 is 7.1mx3.66m which will be distributed to the displaced families.
- 100 kitchen sets, 200 family kits, 600 blankets, 200 shelter kits and other non food items from The Red Cross is assumed to have arrived with C-130 today to Aitutaki.

- Rotary has provided 100 emergency kits, which include various useful non food items such as kitchen items, candles, blankets, clothing, medical and toiletries, shelter tools and others.
- Roofing iron is an urgent need. Some sheets are available on the island, but must be purchased and other supplies are on other islands.
- Transitional shelter issues need to be fully addressed in the government recovery plans since tents and tarpaulins are considered to be temporary emergency shelter.

Food and Nutrition

- To have a better picture on food needs, UNDAC is conducting a rapid assessment of the food situation on island, the result of which will be available shortly.
- ADRA implies that they may be able to provide food support if required. CIRC will coordinate with ADRA on this issue.

Health

- Health assessment results are now available and findings suggest the key issues include inadequate water supply, inadequate sanitation, need for vector control, food safety and sanitation awareness raising, rehabilitation of hospital facilities and provision of medical supplies such as sterilizer, autoclave and hematology analyzer. In addition, medical, laboratory and IT equipment as well as X-ray systems need to be checked and repaired if necessary. Two additional health personnel are also required.
- The health assessment also recommends all births and patients requiring X-ray be referred to Rarotonga.
- A total of four stagnant water sites have been identified as potential breeding grounds for mosquitoes. Two Ministry of Health staff have been deployed to the island who will start vector control by spraying in order to avoid mosquito born diseases.

Protection

- All community information is to be channeled through the EOC in Aitutaki to provide consistence of information and avoid confusion within the community. Health and sanitation awareness raising in addition to the update of relief activities will be shared with communities through existing networks.
- Assessment by Ministry of Education also identified that counseling is one of the areas which require urgent actions and they are planning to provide counseling to school children and teachers.
- Cook Island Red Cross provides support in restoring family links for those who need to identify the location of their family members.

Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene

- The health assessment suggests that around 70% of households on the island have inadequate sanitation, but there is no indication of damaged septic tanks or leaking sewage and the report concludes that at this moment sanitation in terms of sewage is not a priority problem. It is reported that the toilets have been damaged. A further comprehensive WASH assessment is required.
- Problem of sanitary facilities due to lack of water at public facilities where evacuees are accommodated is reported.
- Drinking water is currently available in bottles, from schools or church tanks. The Australian Red Cross water treatment plant could not be loaded on C-130 on time and Air NZ has the next available space for this on Thurs 18/Feb (arriving in Cook Islands on Wed 17/Feb).Therefore, until its arrival and the start of drinking water distribution, people need alternative option.
- People are asked to boil all water to be used for drinking as an immediate solution.

Early Recovery

- A Recovery Plan needs to be urgently formulated by the government to address the key issues in medium and long term such as livelihood and permanent shelter issues and a UNDP recovery advisor was requested to provide technical assistance to the government in the formulation of the plan.
- CARITAS indicated their interest in involving in recovery phase activities such as permanent shelter and school rehabilitation.

IV. Coordination

- The Mayor and Community Leaders have been meeting regularly to discuss the needs of the community and recovery plan.
- A daily coordination meeting among key stakeholder has started in Aitutaki. They will be held daily at 16:00 hrs at the Emergency Operations Center (EOC). The organizations/agencies involved in the relief operation are welcomed and expected to attend this coordination meeting.
- An emergency response steering committee, chaired by Minister Rasmussen, has started meeting daily in Rarotonga (0900 local time).

V. Funding

- NZAID has allocated NZ\$200,000 for relief and recovery efforts. Some of the funding will be channelled through the NZ Red Cross
- NZAID reports that the Cook Island community in New Zealand is mobilised to provide assistance to Aitutaki.

All humanitarian partners including donors and recipient agencies are encouraged to inform FTS of cash and in-kind contributions by sending an email to: fts@reliefweb.int

VI. Contact

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