

This report was issued by OCHA New York, with inputs from OCHA Fiji and the OCHA Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific.

I. HIGHLIGHTS/KEY PRIORITIES

- **Cook Islands were hit by Tropical Cyclone Pat on 10 February (Cook Islands time), and Aitutaki island in the Southern Cook was seriously damaged**
- **A rapid assessment is on-going by the government and Red Cross joint team**
- **Preliminary assessment suggests the priority needs include drinking water, emergency and transitional shelters, restoration of electricity and food**
- **UNDAC team has been deployed to provide coordination support both in Aitutaki and the capital, Rarotonga**

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. 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.

The total population of the island is 1,671 (580 households, 711 houses) and they reside in 19 villages on the main island. It is assumed that the whole population of the island has been affected in one way or another. More than 85% of the houses were severely damaged within the 75-100% damage category. Although the number still needs to be confirmed, a significant number of households were displaced since their houses were totally damaged. These families are temporarily staying at relatives and neighbors houses, schools, and community centers. Electricity and water supply are not available in most parts of the island.

Preliminary assessment information suggests that the priority needs include emergency and transitional shelters, access to drinking water, restoration of electricity and food.

III. Humanitarian Needs and Response

Initial Assessment

- Rapid assessment is on-going. The Ministry of Infrastructure and Planning conducts assessments on the infrastructure damages including houses and public facilities. The Ministry of Health dispatched two health officers to conduct a health related assessment. The Cook Islands Red Cross conducts an overall rapid assessment to grasp the overview of the humanitarian needs. All these assessments are coordinated by Emergency Management Cook Island (EMCI) in the field. The final preliminary assessment result is expected to be ready by tomorrow.

Logistics

- Electricity is not yet recovered in most parts of the island. Electricity technicians were deployed from Rarotonga to Aitutaki and are currently repairing the damaged system. It is assumed it will take one week to finish all the work.
- At this moment, basic transport needs are met. There are 4 commercial flights daily from Rarotonga to Aitutaki. The Cook Islands patrol boat and New Zealand Hercules is on standby. Transports are available on island for relief distribution. The Cook Island's government is trying to negotiate for a

boat coming from Fiji to refuel the Cooks Islands to assist in transporting remaining relief stocks on Wednesday.

- The mobile phone network has been recovered, but it is still often blocked.
- In its preparations and drawing on its auxiliary status to the government, CIRCS has also arranged with the custom authorities to facilitate the clearance of inbound humanitarian goods without incurring duty.

Emergency Shelter/NFIs

- **504 domestic houses** with severe damage within the 75 -100% damage category will require tarpaulins urgently to fix broken roofs and secure the temporary shelters. Displaced people live either at the community halls, schools or neighbor/relative's houses.
- 600 tarpaulins provided by the New Zealand Red Cross are expected to arrive on Aitutaki today. The Red Cross also requested 1,000 extra tarpaulins from NZAID, but it is not yet confirmed whether it can be provided or not. In total it is estimated that 1,500 tarpaulins (6X8 mtr) are required to meet the immediate needs. To date, at the request of CIRCS, the New Zealand Red Cross has mobilized: 100 water containers, 100 tarpaulins, 50 first aid kits, five satellite phones, candles and rain coats were provided to supplement CIRCS's existing pre-positioned relief supplies. In effect, CIRCS is preparing to mobilize further relief items pending the outcome of assessments.
- Roofing irons are also required urgently. Funds to locally purchase the roofing irons (10 coils) need to be urgently identified. In addition, another 10 coils of roofing irons need to be procured outside of the island and to be delivered.
- Since the building of permanent housing will take some time, transitional shelter options need to be urgently identified especially considering the fact that the region is still in the cyclone season.
- On-going assessments will confirm the need for non-food items (NFIs). The Cook Islands Red Cross has a stock of linens and blankets.

Education

- Aitutaki Island has 4 schools, one secondary college and 3 primary schools. The college has 221 students and 10 teachers while 3 primary schools have 281 students in total with 21 teachers.
- A building with 2 class rooms of the SDA Primary School has totally collapsed while another building of the same school has been seriously damaged. Araura Primary school and College is also damaged while Vaifaw Primary school seem to have escaped the obvious structural damage.
- The on-going assessment by Public Works needs to confirm the exact level of the damage to the school buildings, the safety of re-using the existing structure and the cost for repairing and rebuilding the buildings.
- The re-starting date for the schools is not yet confirmed. Firstly, the debris in the sites need to be cleaned up and damaged building needs to be rehabilitated. A temporary option such as school tent needs to be considered in consultation with education committee and Ministry of Education to replace the destroyed schools until the permanent buildings are built. Aitutaki education committee suggested that the priority was on senior students at the colleges.
- Required response includes human resources and equipment for cleaning up the debris at the school site, assessment of WASH facilities at schools, repair and re-building of the partly and totally destroyed school buildings.

Food and Nutrition

- Most crops and fruits have been affected, and the lack of electricity is posing an additional problem for food storage. Basic food assistance might be needed until the livelihood of the affected population is recovered, especially for the most vulnerable such as displaced people.
- The Ministry of Health needs to be consulted on the appropriate food ration packages for the different groups of people such as children, pregnant and lactating mothers.
- The Ministry of Agriculture is committed to support food crop production by providing seedlings and other necessary items.

Health

- The Health assessment team is identifying possible mosquito breeding areas in order to avoid mosquito born diseases, such as dengue. The team is also focusing on sanitation assessment.
- The hospital infrastructure, equipment, machines and facilities need to be checked up and if necessary repaired.
- Health and nutritional conditions of the affected population needs to be closely monitored especially considering the lack of clean drinking water and food shortage. Special attention is required for children, lactating mothers and pregnant women.
- Basic medical kit supplies for the hospital are required. The details need to be confirmed by Ministry of Health.

Protection

- There are no specific security incidents reported, however specific attention is required especially for the displaced.

Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene

- Lack of drinking water is an urgent issue to be addressed. Water tanks which people usually rely on for drinking water has been severely damaged or destroyed at a total of 568 out of 711 houses. Therefore, these water tanks need to be replaced urgently to secure drinking water.
- The island relies on an electricity run water provision system. Due to the electricity cut, most part of the island still do not have access to water. The restoration of electricity for the water system has been restored by 80%. However, the water is not yet available at individual houses until the water head tank is fully re-filled.
- The Australian Red Cross has dispatched a Water and Sanitation expert, and he has arrived on Aitutaki on 12 February. He will be able to assist the authorities to look into possible options to meet the urgent needs for drinking water.
- As an immediate measure, distribution of bottled water is considered as a last resort. Red Cross is proposing, for the first 6 months, to distribute water by trucking from a bore hole which provides drinkable water after treatment. The Australian Red Cross will be able to provide a water treatment plant, and treated water with this plant can be transported by trucks with water bladders of 5,000 L to the villages.

Early Recovery

- Cleaning up of the debris is an urgent issue, which poses potential hazards. School sites also requires urgent clean up so that the re-starting of the schooling can be facilitated. There are some tools such as chain saws, fuels and chainsaws oil as well as human resources required to clean up the debris.
- Support for homes with mortgage repayment need to be considered such as soft loan options as a part of a recovery plan.
- Recovery of livelihoods needs to be fully assessed.

IV. Coordination

- The EOC on the islands is currently staffed with police officers. Emergency Management Cook Island (EMCI) is taking the coordination role in partnership with the island authorities (Mayor, Island Councils). The National Disaster Risk Management Council including the cabinet and key stakeholders such as Red Cross and donors hold regular meetings in Rarotonga.
- Coordination between the island and Rarotonga is made through Police Commissioner, who is the national controller with support of EMCI.
- An UNDAC team has been deployed and will provide coordination support both at Aitutaki and Rarotonga.

V. Funding

To be confirmed

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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