

IN THE NEWS

Americas Humanitarian Logistics Relief Team RELIEF LOGISTICS CENTER

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Working to ensure quick delivery of relief supplies

BY TEO A. BABUN and JULIETA N. VALLS

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

In June, U.N. humanitarian chief Jan Egeland said that North America and Europe should prepare to give more disaster aid to the Caribbean region this year, as hurricane forecasters have predicted that the 2005 hurricane season will be especially active.

'This year could be worse than 2004, when we lost more than 5,000 lives in Haiti alone,' Egeland warned.

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.

At the recent Organization of American States gathering in Fort Lauderdale, Caribbean leaders listed 'sketchy disaster preparedness' as one of their main concerns. The main problem regarding disaster aid in the Caribbean region stems from a logistics bottleneck that keeps relief aid from getting to those with the greatest needs. In 2004, the Caribbean region received massive relief efforts from all of Florida. Much of the aid, however, once collected, could

not be shipped to those countries and was left for days and weeks at collection centers throughout the state. Unfortunately, the lack of logistical coordination kept many of the victims from receiving much needed water, food and medical supplies.

In response, AmericasRelief Team was formed last year to help Latin America and Caribbean countries in time of crisis and disasters with delivery of relief supplies at little or no cost. The consortium's team members have contacts with governmental and nongovernmental institutions in the affected countries and help identify the most urgent relief-aid needs. By the end of last year's hurricane season, AmericasRelief Team had brought together more than 50 companies to address the issues of disaster response. The organization donated, processed, shipped and distributed more than \$18 million to those with the greatest needs, garnering praise from Maj. Gen. Richard Mentemeyer of the U.S. Southern Command, Ambassador Charles E. Cobb, chairman of Florida-FTAA, and Gov. Jeb Bush.

Carnival Cruise Lines' pre-hurricane season workshops helped train the Caribbean Consular Corps on best practices for hurricane preparedness, and FedEx Latin America provided its 747 airplane to Miami-Dade County to help bring assistance and relief supplies to the disaster victims in Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

Florida disaster professionals can help our Caribbean neighbors increase their 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. AmericasRelief 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 AmericasRelief Team member and Washington, D.C.-based Pan American Development Foundation helped empower the American chambers of commerce in Latin America and the Caribbean by aiding in the establishment of a Disaster Committee with a preparedness, mitigation and response protocol. The initiative is sponsored by the Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance. 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, AmericasRelief Team has introduced a program to coordinate relief cargo space from air and ocean cargo carriers operating in the Caribbean.

Progress has been made, but much more needs to be done to ensure quick, effective delivery of relief supplies and other assistance when disaster strikes in the region.

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Getting disaster relief in effective ways to our Caribbean Basin friends