

Press release: Hurricanes Irma and Maria: Sir Alan Duncan on BBC Today programme, 20 September 2017

Asked what we are doing now, Minister for the Americas Sir Alan Duncan said:

Good morning. Well, as you say, bracing ourselves. I mean, this has been a fortnight of just relentless catastrophe, but I think you are right to say that although the fear is that these islands are going to get another hit it looks at the moment that the British Virgin Islands will not get hit as hard as it did before.

And we had a report at 1 o'clock this morning from Montserrat where the storm has passed over. There's been a lot of torrential rain and you've got blocked gullies and things like that. But the government there are doing an initial assessment and we'll get a better report at daylight. But it's not quite as bad as it was before but I'm afraid anything on top of what happened before is quite bad enough and just adds to the misery.

Asked if we should have done more last time, and more quickly, the Minister said:

No, I think this is an utterly unfounded accusation. And for instance, if you read the French papers they were criticising the French government for not doing as much as the British. What we actually did, I think, was professional and quick.

First of all, let me just say again, this is unprecedented. No-one in living memory has ever known 4 hurricanes in a row, and 2 of such ferocity over these Caribbean islands. So what we did was we had a ship in situ, 2 months ahead of this with all the necessary stores. And what that does, in well-tested practices, is to be flexible to go to where the storm hits. It's all very well to say "a storm has hit – why weren't you there?" – by the way if you had pre-positioned supplies on the places that were hit they might have got obliterated, too – but also you've got the flexibility to get there very quickly. Which is exactly what Mounts Bay did.

We got stores, supplies, I mean Mounts Bay very quickly got the hospital and the airport going on Anguilla, it went to the British Virgin Islands and it's done a fantastic job. And HMS Ocean is due in the area on Friday with many, many more stores, fortunately just at about the right time to respond to anything that might now happen.

Find out more about the [government response to Hurricanes Irma and Maria](#)