

Press release: UK ready to respond to Hurricane Maria

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The UK is in position to respond to further extreme weather in the Caribbean as the approaching Storm Maria is reclassified as a hurricane. The hurricane comes less than two weeks after Hurricane Irma, the most powerful hurricane ever recorded.

UK experts on the ground are working closely with national authorities to prepare for the approaching hurricane. Staff, military assets and relief supplies remain in the region and are ready to respond.

DFID, alongside other government departments, are already working on plans to deal with the hurricane's aftermath and are in close contact with Governor's offices. This includes efforts to get people to public shelters and secure loose materials and debris which could cause further injuries.

International Development Secretary Priti Patel said:

We are under no illusions about the possible impact of Hurricane Maria and are taking every measure possible to prepare communities which have already been devastated by Hurricane Irma.

British troops, police and aid experts are working relentlessly to get help to the victims of Hurricane Irma. Those same individuals will now be tasked with also preparing for the impact of Maria, and to ensure support continues to get to those in need.

Chris Austin, the Head of the UK's Joint Task force, added:

We are planning for the unexpected, we are planning for the worst. We need to demonstrate our own resilience because there is a real chance that Hurricane Maria may significantly impact on our existing efforts to provide relief.

To date, 75 tonnes of DFID relief items have either arrived or been procured in the region including much needed food, water, nearly 3000 shelter kits, 5,000 hygiene kits and 10,000 buckets.

A further 60 tonnes of aid and reconstruction materials is on the way to the region on HMS Ocean, and DFID has chartered a number of flights and vessels which will transport additional relief items to the affected islands.

The UK is also leading the way in the long-term reconstruction of islands hit

by Hurricane Irma. Speaking at the 72nd session of the United Nations along with Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson, Ms Patel will say that whilst relief effort will go on, plans are being put in place to help rebuild on the islands, more resiliently than in the past, so a future hurricane won't be as devastating.

UK aid is already having a significant impact on many of the victims including Dorothy, a victim of Hurricane Irma in the British Virgin Islands, who said:

I was so happy when the soldier told me yesterday that my house was the first house that was fixed. He said that they had given people things to fix their houses but my house was the first house that a soldier came and fixed. I said God I'm blessed.

I was the happiest person on earth because I was very sad because I had lost everything. With whatever people give me, or what I can get myself, I'll fix up my place so it looks like somewhere I can live.

Notes to Editors

- Maria is currently a Category 1 hurricane with sustained winds of 80mph. The hurricane is expected to strengthen as it heads towards the Leeward Islands (Barbados). Hurricane warnings are in place for Antigua, Barbuda, Montserrat and Anguilla.
- 32 aid experts, 1,300 military personnel and 59 police officers are working on the UK's response.
- So far the UK has committed nearly £60 million as part of its response to Hurricane Irma.

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