

Rash of Hurricanes Devastates Haiti

The poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere is in dire need of assistance in the wake of four major storms

While the U.S. and Canada slowly recover from an active 2008 hurricane season, observers say poor nations such as Haiti are in dire need of assistance and may never fully rebound from the storms' devastation.

More than 500 people died following a series of four storms that hit Haiti in a three-week period. After Hurricane Ike pummelled the Caribbean nation Sept. 8—just a week after Hurricane Gustav created massive flooding in coastal cities—the city of Gonaives was under water, up to 10 feet in places.

Bridges leading into the coastal city were knocked out, making ground transportation impossible. "The situation ... is catastrophic," Daniel Rouzier, Food for the Poor's spokesman for Haiti, stated after Tropical Storm Hanna, the second storm to sweep through Haiti between mid-August and early September. "We, just like the rest of the victims ... have limited mobility. You can't float a boat, drive a truck or fly anything to the victims."

Terry W. Snow, national director of Youth With A Mission in Haiti, reported in mid-September that though people in the Gonaives area have some food, there is still little or no fuel and no electricity. "We would normally come to their aid, but we are paralyzed," he said.

Mission Aviation Fellowship (MAF) in September began flying personnel and supplies into area airstrips, some of which had been under 8 feet of water. "A lot of the people have moved to the tops of their houses," MAF pilot Will White said. "The

town was completely cut off by water.”

In the south, the situation was not much different. The coastal towns of Jacmel and Les Cayes experienced severe flooding, and the Evangelical Baptist Mission of South Haiti reported that two of its affiliated churches in Les Cayes were washed away along with the pastors’ homes. Three church members died and 20 were missing.

Cuba, Jamaica and the Bahamas also have been hard-hit by hurricanes this year, but deforestation has left Haiti virtually defenseless against severe flooding. When storms hit the island, water and mud rush down the mountainsides because there is little to hold it back.

Haitian President René Préval told the Miami Herald that the devastation in his nation was similar to that of Hurricane Katrina. “This is Katrina in the entire country, but without the means that Louisiana had,” he said.

Haitian Prime Minister Michèle Pierre-Louis, in office only a few weeks, told reporters that part of Gonaïves would have to be relocated because there is nothing to prevent similar flooding in the future.

The U.S. has committed military manpower and \$10 million for disaster relief in Haiti, the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere. Canada has committed \$5 million and is considering sending in military assistance. Although international aid will help, most experts agree that long-term solutions are needed.

“The Parliament should vote a law to stop deforestation in Haiti,” said Dr. Hubert Morquette, a physician and a World Relief representative in Haiti. “Police should reinforce and implement it. We have left less than 10 percent of our tree coverage. That’s a long-term solution.”

In the meantime, missionaries are preparing for a long

recovery effort. "Please continue to keep us in your prayers," said Sheree Beresford, executive director of Danita's Children, an orphanage in Ouanaminthe, which is farther inland and near the border of the Dominican Republic.

Although this ministry didn't suffer damage, Beresford said across the nation people are starving. "Desperate people do desperate things," she said. "We need God's divine protection in these circumstances."

-Jim Uttley Jr.