

NATIONAL DISASTER PREPAREDNESS FOR THE CAYMAN ISLANDS

An inevitable consequence of a major disaster, such as hurricane or earthquake, is the tremendous human suffering that results. This not only relates to death and bodily injury, which are so often attendant and which in themselves create difficult problems, but moreso to the worst effect, which is of a long term nature. I refer to the destruction and damage to houses and to important facilities such as hospitals.

The Cayman Islands although not known to have been effected by severe earthquakes, have been struck many times by severe hurricanes and tidal waves, leaving behind death and much ruin. Through the mercy of Almighty God, however, the territory for over 25 years, has not been visited by a hurricane. Nevertheless, the Islands continue to be as vulnerable to disaster from this source as any other in the region.

The Cayman Islands comprise three small Islands in the Western Caribbean, located at longitude 19 20" latitude 81 15" or approximately 180 miles northwest of Jamaica and about the same distance south of Cuba. They are a dependent territory of Great Britain with a population of just over 16,000.

Over the past 20 years, but especially within the last ten, the territory has experienced a phenomenal economic growth, consequent on the Government adventuring into the field of tourism and international banking.

Unlike the vast majority of other Caribbean Islands which are mountainous or hilly and very adaptable to the profitable pursuit of agriculture, the Cayman Islands are flat with approximately 75% of the land area being swamp while approximately 60% of the remainder is hard limestone rock. Accordingly the plantation economy with which the region has been identified could never include the Cayman Islands. They are without minerals and possess only limited other natural resources on which to rely and consequently the mainstay has always been the sea. The early inhabitants exploited this, primarily in the catching of turtles and fish, and for many generations this was the main source of the territory's income. With a diminishing of the fishing trade, at the turn of the century, occupation shifted mainly to the manning of merchant ships sailing out of United States ports. Because of their seafaring tradition and skill, Caymanian seamen became known and respected the world over and very much in demand. Remittances from their earnings were for many years the mainstay of the territory's economy, to the extent that unlike many of the small territories in the region, the Cayman Islands managed to pay their own housekeeping expenses with practically no outside financial assistance.

Although the earning of seamen continued to play a significant roll in the economic and social stability of the Islands, it became more and more evident that this traditional source of income could no longer be relied upon to maintain the territory's economy in a viable state. As a dependent territory of a metropolitan nation, it had and still has no access to international aid sources. Limited technical and economic aid were received from Great Britain, but these

fell far short of meeting the needs of a developing community. consequently it became necessary to explore new avenues, to ascertain how the limited resources of the territory could be most effectively utilized. Tourism and international banking were the alternatives which offered themselves. The natural features of the Islands lent themselves admirably to the development of a tourist trade while the introduction of new banking laws and extensive improvements to the telecommunications system, created a healthy climate in which international financial operations could thrive.

Within the past decade the developing tourist trade and the attractive offshore banking operations have raised the status of the Cayman Islands from that of an insignificant, little known group of Islands, to one of international prominence. This has resulted in an economic boom unprecedented in the territory's history.

The development referred to here is indeed an enviable one and has certainly wrought a tremendous change in the social, political and economic way of life in the Islands. However, it has not brought all blessings and fortune. It brought many social problems as well. Problems for which the Government and people were not prepared. As a result of the rapid pace of development, a tremendous demand has been placed on the territory's resources of manpower from both the private and public sectors, it was necessary as an expedient to open the immigration flood gates. This brought about an extraordinary increase in population, between 1970 and 1979. For that period the increase recorded was 65.64 percent. A rise of this magnitude is astounding by any standard, but the effects on all facets of the society can be better comprehended when it is known that in the period of 100 years prior, the territory's population increased by only 25%. It will be seen therefore why the resources of the Government are under such a tremendous strain and why it finds it next to impossible to cope with the many demands for social and other infrastructural improvements.

The incidence of the rapid population growth has been felt more in the accommodation areas - housing, hospital, schools and offices - than in any other. In spite of an unprecedented building boom to cope with the demand it has not been possible to catch up.

In the area of housing, overcrowding is becoming a problem, which in turn is creating other problems that are certain to be highlighted if the Islands are struck by a severe hurricane. These problems are related to substandard construction and imprudent siting of houses. Apart from the doubtfulness of these hastily constructed structures to withstand strong winds, many are being built in areas which will be subject to serious flooding under severe hurricane conditions.

Major improvements, to the tune of over one million dollars to hospital facilities were made between 1975 and 1979 and a phased plan for further expansion and improvement is currently under implementation. However, with a rapidly growing population and a steadily expanding tourist trade, my Government is finding it extremely difficult from its own resources, to cope with the consequential demand for important amenities such as housing and medical facilities, to the extent of obviating the need for supplemental assistance in the event of a national disaster.

The position of the Cayman Islands as I have described, with respect to the inability to cope with all the necessary demands upon its resources, is undoubtedly not singular in the region. Therefore, the problems which inhibits adequate disaster preparedness in the Cayman Islands will have the same affect in other

territories. This puts the region in the unfortunate position where one territory will be able to offer little or no assistance to the other in physical preparedness, which is necessary to cope with major disasters.

My Government sees the necessity, therefore, and advocates as a project to achieve the objectives of disaster preparedness, the necessity of international involvement, to assist territories like the Cayman Islands in their preparedness programmes. My Government identifies the following areas of need as being indispensable to the setting up of a viable preparedness programme:

1. emergency medical supplies, equipment and major facilities such as field tent hospitals
2. upgrading of emergency room equipment
3. sterilizers which could be put into service in the event of disruption of electricity supplies
4. emergency lighting and heating equipment
5. tents for emergency housing
6. blankets
7. cooking facilities and utensils
8. portable type sanitary conveniences

While it is conceded that this project has as its main objective, on the spot availability of emergency supplies and equipment for the Cayman Islands, in the event of a major catastrophe, there is also another consideration - a store of supplies that could be drawn upon, if required, to supplement inadequate supplies in some other territory within the region - especially the Western Caribbean, should such territory suffer a misfortune while the Cayman Islands have been spared.

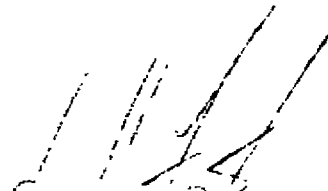
On its part, as a contribution to this Project, my Government would undertake to provide storage for all equipment and supplies, and pay all local costs for labour etc. in the handling of shipments on arrival or on despatch. In the case of drugs; once a stock has been supplied, my Government would undertake to maintain the currency of such stock and as well to ensure that other supplies and equipment are adequately safeguarded and maintained.

Management of the Project would be vested in our Medical and Public Health Department, headed by the Chief Medical Officer who would liasen with the Public Works Department headed by the Chief Engineer. Contact with donor organizations would be established through the Hon. Chief Secretary of the Cayman Islands.

The Cayman Islands presents the foregoing Project for which it considers there are justifications for international support on the following grounds:

- (1) The total absence in the territory, of physical supplies and equipment, to cope with demands occasioned by a national catastrophe.

- (2) The need to have available necessary supplies and equipment to ameliorate human suffering in the face of a national disaster.
- (3) The inability of the Cayman Islands, on financial grounds, to undertake the Project in view of the tremendous strain placed on the territory's resources, to cope with current demands for social and other amenities, consequent on a rapidly burgeoning population. It is hoped that the need for the Project and the assistance being sought will receive the sympathetic consideration of this august body and that it will be accepted for priority consideration by all concerned.



D. H. Foster
Chief Secretary
Cayman Islands

- ... integrated communications equipment to receive local, regional and international warnings,
- ... auxiliary emergency power and energy sources.

c. Crisis management.

The country should:

- ... consider how disaster preparedness and EOC coordination and direction are serviced at all levels of government,
- ... decide on the action necessary to win acceptance for establishment of the EOC,
- ... conduct seminars in crisis management for top government officials,
- ... conduct training courses for disaster administrators, technicians, operators and staff,
- ... conduct public education courses and campaigns.

For outside support. The country should prepare justifications for bilateral and international assistance in crisis management, for example:

- ... technical assistance in crisis management development seminars for top government officials
- ... technical assistance in crisis management courses for disaster personnel
- ... technical assistance in the design of public education courses in self sufficiency for individuals and communities
- ... technical assistance in the design and conduct of specialized training courses on disaster subjects i.e., first aid, mass care, search and rescue, surveys and assessments, surveillance, etc.