

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