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The medical work of a volunteer team in the Dominican Republic following Hurricanes 'David' and 'Frederic'

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INTRODUCTION

'Action d'Urgence Internationale' (International Emergency Action) brings together associations and volunteers who provide practical assistance at times of natural disaster in the form of trained international teams of civilian volunteers. One such team was sent to the Dominican Republic (Fig. 1) on the 8th October 1979, following the destructive hurricanes 'David' and 'Frederic'. According to the UN (UNDRO, 1980), about 2,000 people were killed and more than 4,000 were

injured in the Dominican Republic alone. Approximately 2 million people were effected to some degree (total population 5 million). The material damage is estimated at about 900 million Pesos (U.S. \$830 million).

THE WORK

The team consisted of 2 doctors (1 from 'Médecins sans Frontière' (M.S.F.)), 2 nurses, 1 midwife, 1 nursing auxiliary, and 9 volunteers. A Greek doctor visiting the area, an interpreter-cum-secretary and 2 other occasional interpreters from the town also joined the team.

A dispensary was set up on the edge of Sabana Larga, a small town in a valley north west of the capital, Santo Domingo. The normal population is about 5,000 people. Added to these there was now a refugee centre of 300 people, and others who had sought refuge in the town. The actual population was impossible to estimate accurately. A mobile medical team visited mountain villages within a radius of 15 km (6 hr walk). The total population cared for by this system is thought to be about 10,000 people. The M.S.F. doctor and an A.U.I. volunteer helped at a smaller mountain dispensary.

The dispensary at Sabana Larga was located on the ground floor of a wooden hanger for agricultural goods and equipment. The team lived on the first floor. There was no electricity and the only water available was rainwater and stream water 2 km from the town. During the first 2 weeks, the dispensary was open from 09:00 to 12:30 and 14:00 to 19:00. An average of 100-120 people were seen daily. Towards the end of the team's stay, it was only open in the mornings, only 50 people coming every day, and so freeing the team for reconstruction work in the afternoons.

The patients were first seen by the interpreter-cum-secretary, who established their identity and personal

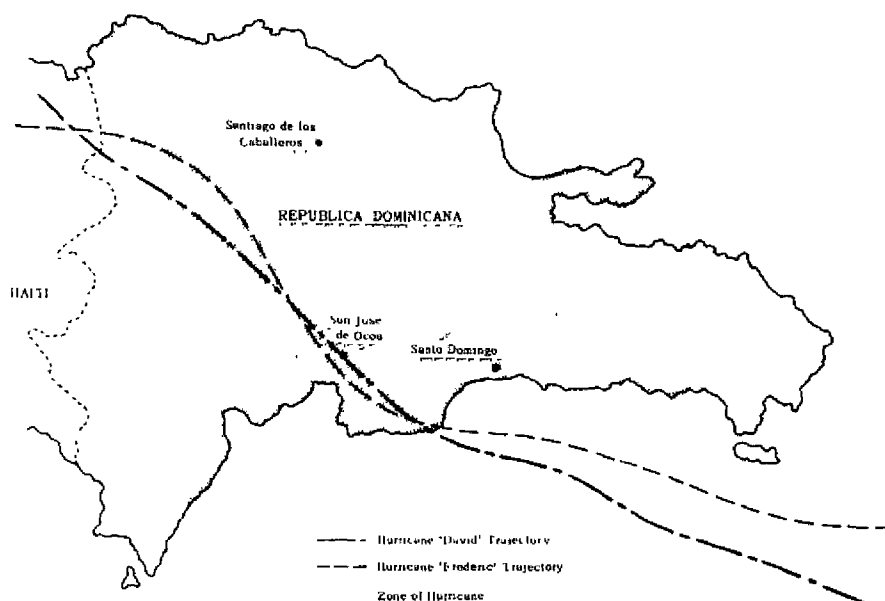


Fig. 1. Map of the Dominican Republic showing the area affected by hurricanes 'David' and 'Frederic'