

Hurricane Tomas Slams St. Lucia

Report from the Pentecostal Assemblies of the West Indies

St Lucia continues to work hard to recover from Hurricane Tomas and its after effects. Tomas battered Saint Lucia from midday Saturday, October 30th to the wee hours of Sunday morning October 31st. The category one storm packed sustained winds in excess of 73 mph and heavy rain which resulted in fallen trees, infrastructural damage to buildings, and damage to major roads consequentially restricting access to various areas and temporary loss of utility services across the island.

Damage to the hotel plant was limited mainly to loss of landscaping and flooding to accommodations. A few hotels reported some structural damage. In the north, the main tourism area, life is more or less back to normal. Water is the one major problem. There is a shortage of water because the supply has been contaminated. The resilience of Lucians and of nature itself is quite amazing and the sense of community and common effort is very much alive.

We can only assume that the lack of media interest in the tragic situation in St Lucia is directly attributable to the St Lucian Tourist Board. Despite the fact that there have been 14 confirmed deaths and many missing, homes washed away, bridges collapsed and roads blocked by landslides, the Minister of Tourism continues to release statements that it's business as usual. Maybe it's in St Lucia's best commercial interest, as 80% of its foreign currency comes from tourism, to pretend that tourism hasn't been affected but that is obviously not the case. The people are in desperate straits and the infrastructure is badly damaged. Despite their legendary resilience Lucians desperately need help and some honest reporting from the regional and world media.

In Castries, landslides have become a hazard, houses have tumbled down hillsides and families are displaced. The city was flooded badly and although the water has now cleared there is a distinct smell of sewage from the contamination. People are going about their daily lives but it is clear the people need potable water! Some parts of the island seem to have had water restored (their supply does not come from the Roseau Dam) and a team is working at the dam to get the supply back on as soon as possible, but they do have a lot of work to do. Help from other islands and the British are on the way.

In the South where many people are homeless, again water is the main problem. Water purification tablets are being shipped in but the amount is insufficient. Schools are closed as they need cleaning and a lot of equipment and books have been destroyed. There of course is no water even for basic sanitary care.

A few nights ago there was a big rush in Marigot as a rumour went round that an organisation was giving away water in the local community centre. The rumour was false but it shows how desperate people are. Residents are urged to conserve water and boil their tap water before consumption in the interim.

Soufriere appears to have been the most affected by Hurricane Tomas with major landslides. The area remains cut off from the neighbouring communities of Choiseul and Canaries. The St. Lucia Electricity Services has committed to engaging the services of a barge to Soufriere to begin the process of power restoration. The town of Soufriere requires extensive clean-up. It is expected that Soufriere will remain isolated from the rest of the country for some time.

Saint Lucia's agriculture industry, particularly bananas were severely affected, with 100% crop damage reported. Livestock fared better with reports of drowned cattle being slaughtered for sale. NEMO has issued a warning to the public to desist from the practice and to not purchase the meat from animals that have drowned during the storm. Additionally the Prime Minister issued a warning of arrest for anyone caught slaughtering dead animals for public sale.

Official government estimates indicate that 10,000 homes have been damaged or destroyed and the total cost of damage has been put at US\$500 million.

Pictures from St. Lucia showing various aspects of the damage follow this report.







