

United Nations Representative in Cuba Praises Level of Preparedness in Face of Devastating Hurricane Matthew



The United Nations has recognized the preventive work conducted by the civil defense in Cuba to protect people in the eastern provinces against the impact of Hurricane Matthew.

The UN system on the island also spoke highly of the recovery work triggered by Cuba in the face of the devastation.

Interviewed by Radio Havana Cuba, Mirta Kaulard, UN system coordinator here, said the level of preparedness shown was outstanding.

“The United Nations system is full of admiration for the efforts made by Cuban institutions and the public administration so that people in areas likely to be affected would be prepared, for the level of resources that have been mobilized and made available to the population, through hard work day and night.

“I congratulate the members of the press for how they followed the situation and kept abreast the population, which also allowed us to guide our participation and assistance; we were informed of what was going on in the affected areas during the six hours that a force four hurricane was hitting here. That had to have been very difficult, and expensive.

“Thanks to it all, we are working to coordinate with the Cuban institutions ways in which we can provide resources for the recovery phase as fast as possible. Various agencies of the UN system are bringing essential materials, and are trying to mobilize the largest possible amount of resources. Agencies like the UNICEF are taking care of issues having to do with water; the World Food Agency, regarding food needs; the FAO regarding agriculture; the UNDP regarding housing reconstruction.

“There are many good experiences dating back to the response provided when Hurricane Sandy, especially concerning housing recovery. Links have been established with the Ministry of Construction, providing know-how and support so that those affected themselves in the communities can engage in rapid reconstruction, using light materials that can afford quick solutions to the issue of housing, alongside a long-term strategy for housing building.

“On the other hand, we expect over the next few weeks to have contacted countries friendly to Cuba so that they assist us in the support, which Cuba deserves so much.”

The UN representative said there are previous examples of UN agencies working with Cuba to provide assistance following the passage of destructive hurricanes.

“UN agencies have for decades accompanied Cuba's efforts to mitigate the damage caused by hurricanes, particularly the UNDP, which has been in Cuba for 46 years and has worked hard in preparing disaster response. Also other agencies, like the World Food Program, the UNICEF, and many others, which have worked closely with the Cuban institutions, each on their field. The response provided in the case of Hurricane Sandy is an important example. Now building on lessons learned, we expect to accelerate the response in the case of Matthew.

“Concerning early warning, the United Nations has supported risk reduction at the local level with equipment to forecast how the weather evolves.

“It is a great pleasure to work in Cuba, because this is a country that has a very strong level of understanding. For us at the United Nations, Cuba is a model of how well risks associated to climate change and natural disasters are understood, and how crucial it is to

invest in preparedness, in analysis, in anticipation, even in training people to be good meteorologists, good communicators. We have visited many times schools where we have seen how children are taught to understand the dangers in their communities, in their villages, how to respond to risks. This is impressive indeed, considering that the country has limited resources.”

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