

Aid arrives in Haiti, but desperation grows in cut-off towns

October 10 2016, by David Mcfadden And Ben Fox



A boat lies washed up amidst Haitian army buildings damaged by Hurricane Matthew, in a seaside fishing neighborhood in Port Salut, Haiti, Sunday, Oct. 9, 2016. Five days after the storm smashed into southwestern Haiti, some communities along the southern coast have yet to receive any assistance, leaving residents who have lost their homes and virtually all of their belongings struggling to find shelter and potable water.(AP Photo/Rebecca Blackwell)

Helicopters are ferrying in food and medicine to devastated

southwestern Haiti, but almost a week after Hurricane Matthew's assault life here is still far from normal and desperation is growing in communities where aid has yet to arrive.

Power is still out, water and food are scarce, and officials say that young men in villages along the road between the hard-hit cities of Les Cayes and Jeremie are putting up blockades of rocks and broken branches to halt convoys of vehicles bringing relief supplies.

"They are seeing these convoys coming through with supplies and they aren't stopping. They are hungry and thirsty and some are getting angry," said Dony St. Germain, an official with El Shaddai Ministries International.

A convoy carrying food, water and medications was attacked by gunmen in a remote valley where there had been a bad mudslide, said Frednel Kedler, the coordinator for the Civil Protection Agency in Grand-Anse department. He said authorities will try to reach marooned and desperate communities west of Jeremie on Monday.

Throughout Haiti's southwestern peninsula, people were digging themselves out from the wreckage of the storm, which killed hundreds, destroyed tens of thousands of houses, left at least 350,000 people in need assistance and raised concerns of a surge in cholera cases.



A salvaged chair hangs in a tree amidst nearby homes destroyed by Hurricane Matthew, in a seaside fishing neighborhood of Port Salut, Haiti, Sunday, Oct. 9, 2016. Nearly a week after the storm smashed into southwestern Haiti, some communities along the southern coast have yet to receive any assistance, leaving residents who have lost their homes and virtually all of their belongings struggling to find shelter and potable water .(AP Photo/Rebecca Blackwell)

Guillaume Silvera, a senior official with the Civil Protection Agency in storm-blasted Grand-Anse, which includes Jeremie, said at least 522 deaths were confirmed there alone—not including people in several remote communities still marooned by collapsed roads and bridges.

The National Civil Protection headquarters in Port-au-Prince, meanwhile, said its official count for the whole country was 336, which included 191 deaths in Grand-Anse.

In the seaside community of Port Salut, teacher Joseph Jean Moren

stood on his neighbor's porch and gestured at a pile of mud-caked mattresses, clothes and books along with the remains of a concrete foundation.

"That was my home" the 43-year-old said.

The house had been about 200 yards (meters) from the ocean on the night of the storm. He and his wife and six children had gone to his neighbor's house, which had a higher foundation. The storm surge brought in massive waves of saltwater, wiping out their house as they watched over the course of about four hours.



People walk past damaged buildings in a seaside fishing neighborhood almost completely destroyed by Hurricane Matthew in Port Salut, Haiti, Sunday, Oct. 9, 2016. Five days after the storm smashed into southwestern Haiti, some communities along the southern coast have yet to receive any assistance, leaving residents who have lost their homes and virtually all of their belongings struggling to find shelter and potable water.(AP Photo/Rebecca Blackwell)

People in Port Salut and Les Cayes said little to no aid had reached them by Sunday. Besides food and water, they need clothing and especially shoes because many have cut their feet or stepped on old nails because so much debris is scattered about.

"I lost everything. See what I have on? Somebody gave it to me," said Merlaine Chere in Port Salut. She showed off a wound from stepping on a nail and said she had been denied treatment at a local hospital because it demanded a \$150 payment she didn't have.

The desperation comes as international relief efforts ramp up.

In Jeremie, a city near the tip of Haiti's southwest peninsula, the sound of hammering could be heard on nearly every street as people patched their roofs as best as they could.

On one corner, Jameson Pierre was mixing cement and making them into blocks. The 22-year-old whose family was stuck in an emergency shelter, saw at least one bright side.



A woman pauses to rest against a fence as she cleans up debris in a seaside fishing neighborhood severely damaged by Hurricane Matthew, in Port Salut, Haiti, Sunday, Oct. 9, 2016. Nearly a week after the storm smashed into southwestern Haiti, some communities along the southern coast have yet to receive any assistance, leaving residents who have lost their homes and virtually all of their belongings struggling to find shelter and potable water.(AP Photo/Rebecca Blackwell)

"There will be lots and lots of jobs since so many homes were knocked down. I've been working for the last three days straight," he said. He said he was getting about a dollar a day.

The first three of five cargo planes of humanitarian aid from the United States have arrived at Port-au-Prince's airport. They were carrying 480 metric tons of relief supplies, including 20,000 hygiene kits, 18,000 sets of kitchen utensils for cooking, 40,000 blankets and 500 rolls of plastic sheeting.

The airstrip in Jeremie is unable to accommodate large cargo planes, so relief was being ferried to the devastated city by helicopter. Three of nine U.S. helicopters had arrived in Jeremie by Sunday, bringing rice and cooking oil, among other things.

"I lost everything I own in this hurricane. I just came here to get some help," said subsistence farmer Markus Bagard, one of roughly 200 Haitians standing outside the airstrip watching the helicopters be unloaded.

Concern was growing over an increase in cholera cases following widespread flooding unleashed by Matthew. An ongoing cholera outbreak has already killed roughly 10,000 people and sickened more than 800,000 since 2010.



A young man stands next to the foundation of his former house, in a seaside fishing neighborhood almost completely destroyed by Hurricane Matthew in Port

Salut, Haiti, Sunday, Oct. 9, 2016. Nearly a week after the storm smashed into southwestern Haiti, some communities along the southern coast have yet to receive any assistance, leaving residents who have lost their homes and virtually all of their belongings struggling to find shelter and potable water.(AP Photo/Rebecca Blackwell)

Maria Sofia Sanon, a health worker overseeing the open-air cholera treatment center in a corner of Jeremie's main hospital, said they were ill-equipped to deal with patients. The area was strewn with broken tree branches, and a group of young mothers sat outside holding up the arms of their glassy-eyed children being rehydrated via IVs.

"They're not supposed to be in the sun, but we have no more beds," Sanon said.

People in Les Cayes and Port Salut said little to no aid has reached them.

Fisherman Dominique Pomper said the mayor came to distribute some rice but that was it. Among other things, he said people here need water. The ocean has intruded into their wells and made their own supplies undrinkable.

Pomper said he tried to stay at home with his family during the storm but they eventually fled as the water rushed into their house. The 61-year-old said it was the worst night of his life but that he would never leave his seaside village.

"We are fishermen here, our job is the water. We can't run away from the water," he said.



A young man uses a mirror to fix his hair in a seaside fishing neighborhood heavily damaged by Hurricane Matthew, in Port Salut, Haiti, Sunday, Oct. 9, 2016. Nearly a week after the storm smashed into southwestern Haiti, some communities along the southern coast have yet to receive any assistance, leaving residents who have lost their homes and virtually all of their belongings struggling to find shelter and potable water.(AP Photo/Rebecca Blackwell)



Residents use a cell phone to take video of a the wreckage left by Hurricane Matthew in a seaside fishing neighborhood of Port Salut, Haiti, Sunday, Oct. 9, 2016. Nearly a week after the storm smashed into southwestern Haiti, some communities along the southern coast have yet to receive any assistance, leaving residents who have lost their homes and virtually all of their belongings struggling to find shelter and potable water .(AP Photo/Rebecca Blackwell)



A man folds his fishing net for the night near where a dugout canoe lies on the beach a seaside fishing neighborhood severally damaged by Hurricane Matthew, in Port Salut, Haiti, Sunday, Oct. 9, 2016. Families unable to lodge with friends in other parts of town are sleeping outdoors on the foundations of disappeared homes. Nearly a week after the storm smashed into southwestern Haiti, some communities along the southern coast have yet to receive any assistance, leaving residents who have lost their homes and virtually all of their belongings struggling to find shelter and potable water.(AP Photo/Rebecca Blackwell)



Debris lies scattered around buildings severely damaged by Hurricane Matthew, in a seaside fishing neighborhood of Port Salut, Haiti, Sunday, Oct. 9, 2016. Nearly a week after the storm smashed into southwestern Haiti, some communities along the southern coast have yet to receive any assistance, leaving residents who have lost their homes and virtually all of their belongings struggling to find shelter and potable water.(AP Photo/Rebecca Blackwell)



Residents walk amidst damaged buildings and debris in a seaside fishing neighborhood almost completely destroyed by Hurricane Matthew, in Port Salut, Haiti, Sunday, Oct. 9, 2016. Nearly a week after the storm smashed into southwestern Haiti, some communities along the southern coast have yet to receive any assistance, leaving residents who have lost their homes and virtually all of their belongings struggling to find shelter and potable water.(AP Photo/Rebecca Blackwell)



A resident walks amidst damaged buildings and debris in a seaside fishing neighborhood almost completely destroyed by Hurricane Matthew, in Port Salut, Haiti, Sunday, Oct. 9, 2016. Nearly a week after the storm smashed into southwestern Haiti, some communities along the southern coast have yet to receive any assistance, leaving residents who have lost their homes and virtually all of their belongings struggling to find shelter and potable water.(AP Photo/Rebecca Blackwell)



Cecile Jean stands in front of her home destroyed by Hurricane Matthew, in a seaside fishing neighborhood in Port Salut, Haiti, Sunday, Oct. 9, 2016. Jean lived in the home with her husband and two children. Nearly a week after the storm smashed into southwestern Haiti, some communities along the southern coast have yet to receive any assistance, leaving residents who have lost their homes and virtually all of their belongings struggling to find shelter and potable water.(AP Photo/Rebecca Blackwell)



A water-damaged campaign poster lies amidst clothes and other household goods outside a home destroyed by Hurricane Matthew in a seaside fishing neighborhood of Port Salut, Haiti, Sunday, Oct. 9, 2016. Oct. 9 was the date set for Haiti's presidential elections, but they were postponed indefinitely after Hurricane Matthew struck nearly a week ago, killing hundreds and leaving whole communities without shelter or potable water. (AP Photo/Rebecca Blackwell)

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