

Hundreds of preventable deaths caused by Hurricane Matthew in Haiti

By John Marion
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The scope of the disaster left in Haiti by Hurricane Matthew is becoming clearer, with hundreds of people dead, tens of thousands without shelter, and many areas still unable to communicate with the outside world nearly a week after the storm made landfall at the town of Les Anglais in the Sud Department.

The storm's winds approached 150 miles per hour at its center, and two feet of rain fell in some areas. Jérémie, a commune of 31,000 on the north coast of the peninsula about 25 miles from Les Anglais, was devastated. In addition to deaths, the loss of communications, and destruction of almost all the commune's houses, 14 new cases of cholera had been reported in Jérémie by Sunday morning.

Estimates of the death toll range from 33—the official government figure, last updated on Saturday—to more than 900. At least 13 have died from cholera, which is spread through contaminated water. The storm left most areas of the Sud and Grand'Anse departments without potable water, and hundreds of thousands of people are once again at risk for the disease, which can kill a person in 24 hours.

The *Wall Street Journal* reported on a visit by Dr. Lynn Black of Massachusetts General Hospital—who is also on the board of the St. Boniface Haiti Foundation—to Les Anglais on Saturday afternoon. The mayor told Dr. Black that 185 had died, more than 700 had been injured, there were 25 new cases of cholera, and the only local doctor had just four bags of IV fluid left.

“Local food supplies were running low because all four bridges leading into the community had been destroyed,” Dr. Black told the *Journal*.

The parliamentary deputy from Torbeck and Chantal in the Sud Department reported more than 100 dead in the town of Chantal alone. He told *Le Nouvelliste* that

he was using his own car to take victims to the hospital, and that “the number of dead is at risk of increasing in the coming days if nothing is done to reconnect Chantal to the rest of the country.” The town was cut off by flooding in the Acul-du-Sud River.

Further west, in the town of Chardonnières, only 10 percent of houses were left standing. As of Friday, coastal towns west of Port-Salut could be reached only on foot or by air.

In Jérémie there were reports of residents with hands and feet cut off by flying sheet metal from roofs because the winds were so strong. That part of the Grand'Anse coast was also cut off from ground transportation, and Jérémie's airport control towers have lost the ability to communicate with incoming planes.

“What we want right now is to be able to give our children something to eat and drink and the chance to sleep in a dry place. Later we'll see about school, elections, and all of that,” an angry resident told *Le Nouvelliste*.

On Saturday, CBS News spoke with a Civil Protection official whose team had found 82 bodies in a mountain town outside of Jérémie, and the deaths had not yet been added to the official count. A missionary reported on fishing villages that were left completely underwater with bodies floating in the water.

As of Friday, according to Haiti's Operations Center for National Emergencies (COUN), 61,537 people were displaced from their homes in the south of the country and spread among 192 provisional shelters. At least 350,000 people were in immediate need of aid, and an estimated 1.3 million were affected by the storm nationwide.

In addition, countless fishing boats were lost and livestock killed. The UN Office for Humanitarian

Affairs reported that 80 percent of crops were destroyed in some areas.

Bill and Hillary Clintons' promises to "build back better" in Haiti after the 2010 earthquake do not even rise to the level of a cruel joke. Even before the storm, according to recent numbers from the World Health Organization, Haiti had only one tenth the recommended number of doctors per 1,000 people (25 per 1,000 instead of the 250 recommended).

There are reports of cholera treatment clinics on the Tiburon Peninsula that were constructed of sheet metal, incapable of withstanding the storm. According to the United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund, 240 Haitians have died of cholera so far in 2016. The disease—which had not been present in Haiti for more than 100 years—has killed nearly 10,000 since infected UN soldiers from Nepal introduced it while Clinton was US Secretary of State and Susan Rice the Ambassador to the UN.

On Saturday, Haiti's national Directorate of Civil Protection increased its official count of the dead to 336, including 38 in the Ouest Department, where Port-au-Prince is located.

Guyler C. Delva, a former secretary of state for communication under Michel Martelly, now writing for Reuters, reported by the end of the week—based on conversations with local officials—that the death toll was above 800. His estimate is different from the government's not just because of delayed communications, but also because of a macabre feud developing among Haiti's elites.

On Friday the government's Ministry of the Interior and Territories accused Delva of inflating the death toll so that foreign NGOs can profit from the crisis.

Interior Minister François Anick Joseph told *Le Nouvelliste* that "if such organizations don't recognize the government, let them not come at all. ... We are not going to transform this nation into a veritable bordello. We experienced 2010, we learned from our errors. We will act as responsible people."

Powerful sections of Haiti's bourgeoisie are seizing on the still unfolding disaster and the discrediting of NGOs to promote nationalism. Reginald Boulos, the multimillionaire head of the country's National Chamber of Commerce and Industry, met with government officials on Friday to promote local industry as a means of recovering from the storm,

according to *Le Nouvelliste*.

Interim President Jocelerme Privert also sought to play down the severity of what residents in all four departments on the Tiburon Peninsula are experiencing. While declaring a three-day period of national mourning and agreeing to postpone presidential elections scheduled for Sunday, Privert refused to declare a state of emergency, telling *Le Nouvelliste* on Friday that "we're not there yet."

According to *Haiti Libre*, the government is insisting that the postponed election will happen in time for a new president to be seated on February 7. This inauguration is already a year late, after fraud and corruption led to the annulment of election results from the fall of 2015.

The US government has deployed 200 marines from its Southern Command to "provide humanitarian assistance and disaster relief," according to the *Marine Corps Times*.

The US Navy has deployed its carrier George Washington, which is loaded with V-22 Osprey and MH-60 Seahawk aircraft, and a transport dock called the Mesa Verde. France is also sending 60 troops.

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