

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

UN EMERGENCY TEAM SENT TO DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

(New York, 1 November 2007): The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has dispatched a six-member United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination team (UNDAC) to the Dominican Republic in the aftermath of Tropical Storm Noel. They will be supported by a team from Telecoms sans Frontières (TSF). The government of the Dominican Republic has declared a state of emergency and has requested international assistance.

Heavy and prolonged rainfall hit most of the country on Sunday, which caused major flooding and landslides. Some 80 % of the country has been affected, 54 people have been killed, 21 remain missing, and some 58,000 are displaced or have been evacuated. In addition, 41 communities are currently isolated, over 24,500 homes have been partially destroyed, while over 600 are completely destroyed, and 21 bridges and highways have been affected. However, as some areas are still cut off, these figures are likely to increase. Rainfall is expected to continue for the next 36 hours, which will likely cause further flooding, landslides and displacement.

President Leonel Fernández announced an initial grant of \$2.9 million through the Presidential Social Assistance Plan. Emergency measures have been activated, lead by the Dominican Emergency Operations Centre (COE), and personnel including rescue teams have been sent to the areas affected, where they have carried out preventive evacuations. Emergency and health teams have been also activated, and ambulances have been deployed to affected areas, among other activities.

However, the current situation in the country surpasses local response capacity. The Civil Defense has reported that shelters have exceeded their maximum capacity. The Secretary of State of Public Health and Social Assistance has noted that this could be a ‘worst case’ scenario for the country. There is also concern about potential malnutrition and disease outbreaks, including acute diarrhea, acute respiratory infections including pneumonia, gastroenteritis, and dengue.

The United Nations Emergency Technical Team (UNETE) in the country, in conjunction with the Civil Defense conducted a rapid needs assessment yesterday. OCHA is allocating an emergency cash grant of \$50,000 to purchase emergency relief supplies. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)/Pan American Disaster Response Unit (PADRU) is in contact with the Dominican Red Cross, and about 500 volunteers have been mobilized. They have also allocated an emergency grant of almost \$130,000 and deployed emergency teams. The US Office for Foreign Disaster Assistance has also sent an emergency team.

Indications of major needs include food (particularly for children and babies), shelter materials, mattresses, sheets, mosquito nets, brooms, water and sanitation, personal hygiene supplies, medicine and medical equipment, and security. There is also a lack of fuel and oil for search and rescue in the field.