

Bahamas officials say thousands missing in Hurricane Dorian's wake



Nassau, September 11 (RHC)-- Bahamian officials said on Wednesday that 2,500 people have been registered as missing in the wake of the devastating Hurricane Dorian, a count they said may include people who have fled to shelters around the islands.

"This list has not yet been checked against government records of who are staying in shelters or who have been evacuated," National Emergency Management Agency spokesman Carl Smith told a news conference. "The database processing is underway."

Thousands of people are still in shelters on the islands. Officials have confirmed 50 deaths caused by the September 1st storm but have warned that toll is likely to rise substantially.

People all over Nassau are still searching for friends and family they have not seen since the storm. "My friends are missing, a few of my cousins are missing over there, five in total, they lived in Marsh Harbour," said Clara Bain, a 38-year-old tour guide, referring to the Abaco town where officials estimate that 90 percent of homes and buildings were damaged or destroyed by the storm. "Everyone on the islands are missing someone, it's really devastating," Bain said.

Dorian slammed into the Bahamas over a week ago as one of the strongest Caribbean hurricanes on record, packing top sustained winds of 298km (185 miles) per hour. Officials say that more than 5,000 people had evacuated to New Providence, where Nassau is located, but that they had seen a "significant reduction" in the number of people asking to be evacuated.

In Nassau, however, desperation mounted earlier this week as survivors were turned away from overflowing shelters. The Bahamas Gaming Operators Association said on Tuesday it had built more than 1,394 square metres (15,000 square feet) of air-conditioned, tent housing for more than 800 people. Some 295 people were staying in those tents on Wednesday, Bahamian officials said.

More will come, with officials planning to erect two "tent city" relief centers capable of housing around 4,000 people around hard-hit Marsh Harbour on Great Abaco Island, John Michael-Clark, co-chairman of the Bahamas' disaster relief and reconstruction committee, told reporters this week.

The two centers, one to the north of the town and the other to the south, will provide temporary housing to people who wish to rebuild their homes on the island.

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