

Death toll mounts in Bahamas as Hurricane Dorian lingers off Carolina coast

A reporter
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Officials in the Bahamas said Thursday that the confirmed death toll had risen from seven to 20 and was expected to “increase significantly” as rescue crews and aid workers go further into the two islands, Grand Bahama and Abaco, that were the hardest hit by Hurricane Dorian.

Meanwhile the storm continues to cause damage along the southeast Atlantic coast of the United States, with flooding, high winds and occasional tornados reported in South Carolina, as well as a storm surge of 7-8 feet along both the South Carolina and North Carolina coasts.

The Bahamian government transported hundreds of police, marines and health care workers to the affected area Thursday, and they were joined by international support from the Red Cross, the United Nations, the US Coast Guard and the British Navy.

The biggest single need was for emergency shelter, because nearly every home on the two islands has been damaged and many are smashed to splinters. Grand Bahama was the second most populous of the island chain and Abaco was the third most populous, with a combined total of about 73,000.

The Bahamas have a total population of 400,000, with more than 70 percent living in Nassau, the capital and largest city, which was well south of the route taken by Dorian through the island chain.

Dorian is the strongest hurricane to make landfall from the Atlantic since 1935, with Category 5 winds of 185 miles per hour and wind gusts of up to 220 miles per hour. The storm virtually came to a stop when it reached Grand Bahama Sunday, its eyewall, where the strongest winds are located, stalling over the island for 38 hours.

Meteorologists said that there is no comparable instance in recorded history of wind and rain of such

intensity and duration combined at a single location. The barometric pressure of 910 millibars is lower (more intense) than that recorded by Hurricane Andrew, which laid waste to south Florida in 1992.

There is little doubt that the growing frequency of the strongest hurricanes—at least one category 5 storm in each of the last four years, an unprecedented streak—is powered by global warming. Water temperatures are 1 degree Celsius higher in the ocean region where Dorian originated. Climate change is also believed to be linked to the tendency of such large storms to stall in place, thus increasing the damage they can cause to a particular location.

As much as half of the land surface of Grand Bahama is still covered by water, from the combination of endless rain and storm surge. According to press reports, the island’s airport is destroyed, the only public hospital is damaged, the two main supermarkets in Freeport, a city of 25,000, are under water, as are the warehouses that supply them.

Grand Bahama had a population of 52,000 before the storm, and only three deaths have been confirmed, but more than half the housing on the island has been smashed to pieces. There is every likelihood that there are many bodies still to be recovered.

Long lists of missing persons—one with more than 5,500 names—have been uploaded to social media sites established to allow survivors to make connection with displaced family or friends.

On Abaco, the airport remains under water, the Haitian refugee shantytown at The Mudd has been obliterated, and many parts of the island look, in aerial photos, like debris fields from saturation bombing.

Survivors told harrowing stories to the media about fleeing the 25-foot storm surge that swamped homes up into their second storeys, and seeing windows, doors

and even walls explode from the force of the powerful winds.

They used words like “total devastation,” “apocalyptic,” “generational,” “decimation,” while maintaining that these were completely inadequate to describe the damage.

The first private ships loaded with relief supplies were expected to leave Nassau Friday for the two islands. They will have difficulty unloading because harbor facilities were heavily damaged and the waters at Marsh Harbour and Freeport are filled with debris.

Property damage in the Bahamas was estimated at \$7 billion, not including infrastructure, which is a total loss on both islands, and automobiles and boats, many of which were thrown hundreds of yards by the force of the storm.

In the face of such need, the amounts of aid promised by the main imperialist powers with ties to the country, the United States, only 50 miles away at some points, and Great Britain, the former colonial ruler, are a drop in the bucket.

Dorian is also causing extensive damage in Florida, Georgia, South Carolina and North Carolina, although it has stayed offshore about 50-60 miles, and its wind velocity has dropped to 115 miles per hour near the eyewall, and 75 miles per hour at the shoreline.

The National Weather Service warned of rainfall rates reaching three inches per hour with “widespread flash flooding, some of which may be significant” along the coast of South Carolina

About 225,000 customers were without power in the Carolinas and Georgia, with Duke Energy, the main private utility, projecting 700,000 customers without power by the time the hurricane passed through.

On Thursday the hurricane pushed up the Georgia and South Carolina coast and reached Wilmington, North Carolina by the evening. It was expected to pound the southeast portion of North Carolina on Friday, including the Outer Banks, before continuing northeast into the open sea.

Virginia Governor Ralph Northam declared an emergency in anticipation of the storm affecting the Norfolk-Virginia Beach area, likely its last point of contact with the US before it passes northeast into the open Atlantic. It may eventually make landfall in several days in the Atlantic Provinces of Canada, although it would be a much weaker storm by then.



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