

# Local reports claim thousands dead in the Bahamas from Hurricane Dorian

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As the official death count from Hurricane Dorian rose to 50 on Tuesday, local Bahamian press reports are estimating thousands killed from the Category 5 storm over the past week.

A “shocking report by agencies on the ground” published in the *Bahamas Press* calculates as many as 3,000 dead could be counted on the island of Great Abaco alone. “The numbers are ‘staggering’ just as the Minister of Health Dr. Duane Sands suggested last week,” the report states, noting, “sources inside [National Emergency Management Agency] tell us the guidelines left in place for the management of a Natural Disaster were never followed,” resulting in “the worst and most chaotic management of a natural disaster ever in the history of the Bahamas.” The *Nassau Punch* published a similar figure Monday.

The UN World Food Program has estimated as many as 90 percent of all structures in Marsh Harbour, the largest city on Abaco, have been reduced to rubble by Dorian. “There is the smell of death in that area,” said Dr. Rudy Moise to the *Tampa Bay Times*. Moise has led humanitarian efforts to assist the afflicted Haitian population on Abaco.

According to the *Washington Post*, a brief search of “less than one-tenth” of the impoverished shantytowns of the Mudd and Pigeon Peas “yielded five bodies.” Citing comments from the islands’ health minister, CNN reported “body bags, additional morticians and refrigerated coolers to properly store bodies are being transported to Abaco and other affected areas ... Four morticians in Abaco are embalming remains because officials have run out of coolers.”

DorianPeopleSearch.com has had thousands of names entered into its database, as worried members of the population seek to find their loved ones. “Given the storm surge and significant flooding from the

hurricane, it is likely that some bodies may have washed out to sea ... The exact death count may never be known,” said the World Health Organization’s Esther Mary de Gourville to the *Post*.

Additional reports note at least seven others killed in the southeast United States and Puerto Rico.

The reports come days after health minister Sands predicted the Category 5 hurricane would inflict “a significant and unimaginable toll” on the Bahamas. On Sunday, responding to allegations that the government of Prime Minister Hubert Minnis was hiding the storm’s death toll, Sands stated to the *Miami Herald* that counting the dead “is not the priority ... The priority is find those people for their loved ones who are missing them.”

Sands argued: “We are talking about a massive, multi-island operation ... We could not land a fixed-wing airplane until two days ago. The harbor was not available because of debris. Most of the vehicles on the ground were destroyed because they were under water. I need people to understand the logistics of this.” Sands complained about the criticism his operation was receiving: “once that is spread by social media, it goes like wildfire. The time we could be spending on actually helping people, we’re having to put out multiple fires.”

In addition to the sheer destruction, survivors in affected areas must now contend with starvation and disease. “It’s not been a good experience because [the rescue operation is] not organized,” said Matthew Taylor, a resident of Dundas Town to the *Nassau Guardian*. Speaking of his former village, he said, “It’s unlivable. After the water is gone, what do you do? You know, you have bodies contaminating the water and stuff like that, so the water is undrinkable. That’s where the panic is now.”

The *Guardian* article reported Friday that, despite public assurances from Prime Minister Minnis that the commercial airline Bahamasair would begin transferring survivors off the disaster-stricken islands “free of charge,” many survivors have been forced to buy their way to safety. “We have to buy our own plane ticket to get off from Abaco. We had to book them online to get off Abaco. They’re charging us \$155 one-way. There’s no service. It’s chaos,” said one woman to the *Guardian*.

The Bahamian government has also reportedly sought to exclude poor and undocumented victims of the hurricane from receiving aid. On Saturday, Minnis declared that his government in Nassau “cannot possibly accommodate” all the hurricane’s victims. According to a *Tampa Bay Times* on-the-spot dispatch, “the faces of arriving Haitians [bear] looks of fear. Many [are] concerned about what would happen to them in Nassau, where those without documentation and families are being put up in local shelters.”

While the Bahamian conservative government has sought to minimize its role in the catastrophe that is unfolding, some of the most powerful governments in the world have stood by and washed their hands of the crisis.

CNN reported Tuesday that Trump administration officials in the United States would not extend Temporary Protected Status to Bahamian refugees fleeing the devastation in the Bahamas, contradicting earlier official statements.

On Monday, Customs and Border Protection Commissioner Mark Morgan told reporters it would be “appropriate” to give such protection to refugees. However, by Tuesday “administration officials ultimately decided that TPS was not an option for the Bahamians because of the statutory obstacles in place, the time it would take to provide relief and the number of those who would be eligible,” noted CNN, citing an unnamed administration source.

The rebuke came after Trump had given a fascistic comment to the press, declaring that his administration would not allow “people that weren’t supposed to be in the Bahamas to go to the United States” and that “some very bad people and some very bad gang members and some very, very bad drug dealers” were seeking accommodation.

Thus far, the United States Agency for International

Development has given approximately \$2.8 million, a mere drop in the bucket of the assistance required to repair the many billions of dollars in estimated damage done to the islands.



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