Hurricane Irma Press Release by Cuban Council of Churches

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The Cuban Council of Churches will participate actively in the recovery efforts following the devastation caused by Hurricane Irma.

Psalm 46:1 – 5
“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved; God will help it when the morning dawns.”

Cuba faced a unique and unprecedented phenomenon when Hurricane Irma severely affected eleven provinces of the archipelago. During its devastating passage it remained category 5 for more than 72 hours and with a slow movement that allowed it to be parked in several of the territories that suffered more damages, with effects of hurricane or tropical storm winds. Among the most significant effects are the loss of ten lives, even when more than one million people were evacuated; the total or partial collapse of thousands of homes and the loss of the material resources of a large number of Cuban families; severe damage to flora and fauna that has not yet been quantified; devastation in several coastal zones of both coasts as well as in the cays adjacent to the central provinces of the country, including severe damages in protected areas.

Hurricane Irma is the first meteorological phenomenon to compromise the functioning of the national electro-energy system critically. This caused more than half of the country to be without electricity for more than 72 hours. The tourism sector - the main economic line of the island - suffered severe damages just one month before the beginning of the high tourist season. This implies a strong blow to the national economy and a challenge to the responsiveness for the recovery of the facilities and natural areas that constitute tourist destinations.

Even though the Cuban state has mobilized large resources to protect the population, serious difficulties persist in several provinces with basic resources such as water and food, as well as situations that may compromise epidemiological stability and cause a health
emergency. Since the deep damage that Irma caused, the Council of Churches of Cuba and its National and Regional Emergency Committees, as well as groups in local areas, in partnership with national and local authorities and other civic social service organizations, adopted several measures aimed at both prevention and response, following compliance with established protocols. Numerous churches and pastoral homes served as evacuation and refuge centers for Cubans and many Cubans supported work such as the transportation of evacuees and the distribution of drinking water through the network of water systems installed in churches and centers.

After an evaluation of the affectations caused by Irma and several field visits in provinces such as Havana, Matanzas, Villa Clara, Sancti Spíritus, Ciego de Ávila, Camagüey and Las Tunas, the Council of Churches of Cuba is in dialogue with the Cuban authorities, as well as numerous international organizations and platforms that have sent messages of solidarity and expressed their willingness to contribute to the recovery of the Cuban people. Among them are ACT-Alliance which is helping to organize a comprehensive response and accompany us with personnel, Bread for the World, Missionary Work of Berlin, CBM, Diakonia Sweden, different Bible Societies in the world, Dominican Church Social Service, Disciples of Christ Church of the USA, National Council of Churches of Christ of the United States, Servants United Around the World of the World United States, Samaritan’s Purse and World Vision, Wine to Water, The Presbyterian Church of the United States USA, Haven Today and the Board of World Mission of the Moravian Church in North America.

As part of the aid, food, medicines, toilet kits, construction tools and water filters, among other resources, have been offered as well as pastoral support and psychosocial care in affected communities. Volunteers of the Missionary Work of Berlin have announced their arrival in Cuban territory in two weeks to join the work of recovery. As has happened with previous natural phenomena, the Council of Churches of Cuba will have an active participation in the recovery of the Cuban people and will continue to share its message of faith and hope. From its ecumenical vocation, the CIC invites its members and friends throughout the world to join efforts in the service of those who today suffer the psychological, spiritual and material consequences of such a devastating hydrometeorological event.

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