



Report 18/2/2016

First Report of Rebuild Bahamas Hurricane Relief Programme

The passage of Hurricane Joaquin through the southern islands of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas (The Bahamas) left significant destruction in its wake, which extended to both individuals and businesses. The immediate response by the citizens of The Bahamas and relevant agencies was tremendous and provided much needed relief at the time. The full restoration of impacted communities is a longer process, but of great importance as we as a country seek to get our brothers and sisters in those affected islands back to some state of normalcy, albeit a possible new normalcy.

Launch of Rebuild Bahamas

The Bahamas Chamber of Commerce and Employers Confederation (BCCEC) embarked immediately on efforts to assist businesses in the affected islands. We recognized that for many of these islands the small and medium size businesses were the lifelines of the communities, providing employment along with goods and supplies for residents. Further, very few of these businesses had the necessary insurances to defray the costs of restoration, which compounds the challenge of sourcing funding and assistance to restore the businesses and general commerce of the affected islands.

To raise resources for its efforts, the BCCEC partnered with the Rotary Clubs of The Bahamas (Rotary) and hosted a successful telethon event dubbed "Rebuild Bahamas".

Successful Fundraising

The Rebuild Bahamas telethon raised in excess of \$220,000, which has been and will continue to be used until fully exhausted to provide "grant relief" to businesses. Since that time, there have been further commitments made by the Bahamas Venture Capital Fund in the amount of \$250,000 (for loans to applicable businesses) and through Rotary for additional funds raised, both by local as well as international donors..

A summary of the financial statement of the Rebuild Bahamas Hurricane Relief is attached. To date there has been a total of \$828,529.13 collected and, or committed to the Rebuild efforts, broken down as follows:

- Rotary Clubs of The Bahamas - \$357,268.93
- Rebuild Bahamas (Chamber and Rotary) - \$221,220.20
- Bahamas Entrepreneurial Venture Fund - \$250,000.00



These acts of generosity have enabled “Rebuild Bahamas” to commence a programme of financial assistance to qualifying businesses in the affected islands.

Chamber Due Diligence & Response to Critical Needs

In an effort to ensure proper due diligence, an application process and review committee were implemented. Additionally, so that assistance-funds are used in the manner envisioned following approval, payments are made directly to vendors of the equipment or services required to restore the respective businesses.

Of the funds raised, \$258,971.70 have already been expended to date to assist businesses generally throughout the impacted Family Islands, with some instances of relief to specific businesses.

Additionally, the joint ‘Rebuild Bahamas’ efforts of Rotary and the BCCEC have already funded several flights for crisis counsellors to go to the affected islands. We have also provided fuel for many of the relief flights.

Specific Success Story – Refloating of Vessels

Great progress has been made with the fishing fleet in Long Island, the most impacted island, as well as addressing the business needs of other businesses in the impacted Family Islands.

Rebuild Bahamas has contracted Resolve Salvage & Fire, represented by Long Islander Ray Darville, to refloat the fleet. Resolve was initially hired to refloat the Mailboat but once they were on the island, it made sense to work to refloat other vessels as well. Currently, several fishing boats have been removed from where they were dumped inland by the wind and waves of Hurricane Joaquin and are now floating at anchor waiting for repair. The Long Islanders’ Association has also given generously towards the efforts.

To date, the 62ft vessel Southern Comfort is back in the water and when repaired in a couple of weeks, twenty (20) people will be back in employment! All eight (8) boats for which we have contracted with Resolve have now been refloated, including Double Trouble, Summer Crab 2 and Bahamas Raider, getting over one hundred (100) people back to work and reviving the local fishing industry. In addition, several Long Island residents will be employed to repair and restore the damaged vessels.



Business Rebuilding Needs Reports

Regarding longer term rebuilding efforts, Reports submitted to Rebuild Bahamas to date indicate that over 139 businesses were impacted by the hurricane, not including the fishing industry in Long Island. Over the past few weeks, applications for assistance with rebuilding businesses have been received from islands ravaged by Hurricane Joaquin, including:

Acklins	26
Crooked Island	10
Inagua	9
Long Island	77
San Salvador	17

The nature of assistance requested ranges from repairs and replacement of fishing boats, motor engines, generators, coolers and freezers, to general retail, service stations, tourism related enterprises and other service industries. Total dollar amount requested to date is \$2,275,522.90.

Review of applications has been hindered in part due to applicants having not provided complete information to enable a proper assessment. Specifically, a significant number of applicants have not yet provided estimates or invoices for damages or losses incurred. Review and approval of those applications are still pending.

Next Steps

The Chamber is continuing to liaise with the businesses with outstanding information to be presented, so that the assistance required can be delivered to them. Follow up visits to the affected islands are occurring periodically by Chamber personnel and, at their own expense, Chamber Board members are also visiting the islands to ensure that this process is effective and efficient.

Chamber liaising with Government to Expand Exigency Relief to Businesses

As part of the restoration efforts, the Ministry of Finance declared an exigency pursuant to provision of Tariff Code 9817.0000 of Chapter 98 of the First Schedule to the Tariff Act on October 6, 2015, for ninety (90) days. This relief was extended for a further ninety (90) days on January 5, 2016. However,



this exigency relief was intended solely for residents and did not extend to businesses in the affected islands.

The BCCEC has requested of the Government that tax relief similar to that provided in the declaration of exigency (duty and value added tax (VAT) exemptions) for residents be extended to qualifying businesses. Such businesses are the engines of these islands and very candidly stated, without restoration of businesses to generate employment and circulation of funds, the existing declaration of exigency will not benefit the very persons it seeks to assist. Such persons have no means of income to acquire goods necessary for restoration without these businesses being restored and employment reignited. The Government was receptive to our request and is reviewing the matter.

The BCCEC also met with the Department of Customs to discuss mechanisms to effect this request and we understand that the options would be the broadening of the declaration of exigency to include qualifying businesses, or the use of the Family Island Development Act. Goods and supplies to be included under a tax relief programme should include building materials and equipment necessary to restore operations.

The BCCEC will continue to follow up with the Government on these business-specific relief initiatives.

Finally, The Bahamas Chamber of Commerce and Employers' Confederation, along with its social partners are establishing the framework for the formation of the Rebuild Bahamas Foundation, which objects and purpose shall be to:

1. Manage its assets and to do all such things, to conduct all such activities and to exercise all such powers as are reasonably necessary therefore or ancillary or incidental thereto or otherwise authorized by section 4 of the Act, including but not limited to the following activities pursuant to its mandate to be involved in efforts toward rebuilding all aspects of Bahamian society including infrastructural aspects through the establishment of long lasting public private initiatives and efforts;
2. Pursue efforts to rebuild the commercial infrastructure of areas of The Bahamas damaged by natural disasters including the funding of research into and construction of purpose built hurricane disaster shelters;
3. Investigate and provide financial and managerial assistance toward the establishment and re-establishment of viable commercial ventures and the development of sustainable profitable



industries throughout The Bahamas via its partnership with the Chamber of Commerce and other entities such as Rotary;

4. Raise and supply funding necessary to support its efforts and through a partnership with Rotary, it shall ensure that its assets are managed in a clear and overtly transparent manner where all funds are used toward the management of its activities and the funding of its charitable objects; and, not for profit.

The foundation's mandate shall be wide enough to include any aspect which could be defined as an effort toward rebuilding repairing and or enhancing any aspect of Bahamian society which is in need of the collective focused attention of the greater society at large; be it the education system, penal system, transportation systems and or various aspects of our social system, and or any other issue of national significance which, may present itself.