

The Virgin Islands Consortium

St. John Suffered 'Much More Damage' Than St. Thomas, Governor Says; St. Thomas Curfew Now 6:00 p.m. To 12 Noon

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Governor Kenneth Mapp toured the skies of St. Thomas and St. John today, seeing for himself the damage left behind by Hurricane Irma, whose sights are now set on Florida. It was Mr. Mapp's first visit to the St. Thomas-St. John District since the storm's passing, and during a press briefing held on Friday at Government House on St. Croix (Government House St. Thomas lost its roof during the storm), the territory's leader conveyed what he described as a "tremendously emotional" experience.

"I looked at catastrophic destruction of homes, of roofs torn out, of walls collapsing. In one instance, on the north side of St. Thomas, a house was blown off of its foundation and was sitting on its side with its roof intact," Mr. Mapp revealed.

The account for the first day following Irma's landfall to the USVI, was that St. Thomas had sustained the most extreme damage, a narrative that emerged because it was near impossible to know what had happened to St. John, as communication lines were compromised. But as more information came available, and pictures started to appear online, it was clear that St. John had suffered as much damage -- if not more -- than St. Thomas.

Governor Mapp confirmed it to be more.

"As we went over to St. John I couldn't imagine, after looking at the destruction in St. Thomas, that it could be worse. But the folks on St. John suffered more. More horrific damage, much more explosive natures of their homes," Mr. Mapp said.

The ravaged state of the islands overwhelmed the governor, compelling him to ask for five minutes alone. But Mr. Mapp was re-energized, he said, after witnessing the resolve of Hurricane victims, who he said were eager to help with recovery efforts even after being so adversely impacted by the storm.

"You saw some folks whose roof was gone, sitting on their porch... and as we did the fly-overs, a number of people got out and waved. In one incident, some folks were waving the American flag, just happy to see that within 48 hours the governments of their country is responding to such a dire event," Mr. Mapp said.

While the governor has continuously expressed gratitude, and has praised, local first responders, he lauded the U.S. government for its wholehearted response to the devastation left behind by Irma, which, through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), has deployed in full strength -- with ships and helicopters -- a great number of soldiers, whose descent on St. Thomas and St. John with not only their presence, but with items needed to help citizens recover, has been a welcomed relief.

Asked by The Consortium whether there was a limit to how much funds the U.S. government is willing to spend to help the territory recover, John Rabin, acting regional administrator for FEMA Region II, said while there was a finite amount of resources in general for the federal government to respond to natural disasters around the country, FEMA would do its best to provide all the support to address the territory's needs.

"There's no cap to the cost. If the Virgin Islands needs resources and support, the Virgin Islands will request that, and we will do our best to provide that," Mr. Rabin said. "While there is a finite amount of resources between Hurricane Harvey [In Texas] and Hurricane Irma here in the Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico and its course towards the continental United States, there will be some resource challenges, but it's not a financial challenge." Mr. Rabin said FEMA has been working with Congress for additional funding, which should be addressed in the coming weeks.

"As far as I'm concerned, we are here to support the governor, and to help achieve his administration's priorities, and if that requires us to get some more stuff here to help them, we're going to get some more stuff here to help," Mr. Rabin said.

William Vogel, federal coordinating officer of FEMA Region II, said the devastation was great, and that the recovery would be long, but "FEMA's going to be here with you." He said the U.S. Military has changed the way it does business, "and has stepped up to the plate to really help us help you when you need it."

The military has provided FEMA with ships that are about 20 miles offshore, in an effort to provide rapid and continues aircraft support. Military personnel include airmen, soldiers, Marines, and Coast Guard, among others, Mr. Vogel said.

It's a show of force in aid like no other country could provide, said Brigadier General Deborah Howell, whose heart welled up with pride, she said, as she witnessed the strong presence of the American military deployed to the U.S. Virgin Islands. "One of the things I do want to say is that it was heart-warming to wear U.S. over my heart on the left side, for the simple reason that being a part of the United States Military, comes with the resources that no other country really can do," Brigadier Gen. Howell said.

Yet, amid all the encouraging news, there were some reports of looting in both St. Thomas and St. John, which was acknowledged by Police Commissioner Delroy Richards. He said his officers would work to quell the situation, and noted that it was one of the reasons for the altered curfew -- which Mr. Mapp announced at the press briefing was changed from all day, to between 6:00 p.m. to 12 noon, which gives citizens 6 hours to conduct their matters.

Important Highlights

- Effective immediately, the curfew in St. Thomas is now from 6:00 p.m. to 12 noon. Anyone seen on the streets after the curfew could face arrest.
- School will begin on Tuesday on St. Croix; there is reopening date for school on St. Thomas.
- The Cyrile E. King Airport will be closed for commercial flights until further notice. However, chartered flights will be allowed.
- The death toll remains at 4, but the number may rise.
- Limited ferry service is up and running between St. Thomas and St. John from Red Hook to Cruz Bay.
- Help is coming to Water Island
- Mapp plans to brief the territory at 5:00 p.m. on Hurricane Irma relief efforts moving forward.
- The American Red Cross has established a helpline to aid with family reunification. The toll-free number is 1-800-RED-CROSS or 1-800-733-2767. To speak to an operator, choose option (1).
- 38 nurses from St. Croix are being deployed to the St. Thomas-St. John District
- 10 V.I.P.D. officers from St. Croix have been deployed to the St. Thomas-St. John District

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