

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Tutu High Rise To Be Completely Evacuated; WAPA Resumes Power Restoration

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ST. CROIX -- Governor Kenneth Mapp said at a press conference at Government House here on Thursday evening, that his administration has decided to remove all residents from the Tutu High Rise housing community, who are still living in the ravaged buildings following Hurricane Irma's assault on the territory last week Wednesday.

The governor's decision came following a stop to the housing community, called Ras Valley, today, along with Tim Duncan and former New York mayor Michael Bloomberg. The Consortium reported on the dire situation of the residents still in the compromised buildings on Tuesday, with the video eliciting the angst of those who viewed it (watch it below).

[View the original embedded media](#)

"It really was heart-wrenching to go there and see how the hurricane just blew the walls on both sides of the buildings that are three and four stories tall, and they just look like open match boxes," Mr. Mapp said. The governor marveled that less deaths had occurred even though the storm had completely ruined the buildings.

According to Mr. Mapp, following conversations with V.I. Housing Authority's executive director, Robert Graham, a decision was made to remove all of the remaining residents out of Tutu High Rise "as soon as possible." The facility houses about 285 families, 160 of whom as of Thursday were being housed in shelters, with the remaining families still living in the wrecked units.

During The Consortium's visit of Tutu High Rise on Tuesday, the devastation -- made abundantly evident by the buildings, but also on the countenance of the remaining residents -- was palpable. Families hanged clothes on makeshift lines inside their residences -- homes that no longer had privacy, as Hurricane Irma ripped through their walls, living in plain view -- from front to back -- belongings like exhibits.

If there was pride left, it was as if none survived the bruising; all residents cared about was survival, as they pleaded with the government to remember them.

Attempting to recall the nightmare, Ruth Petersen, 90, living in one of the upper units, said she had no idea what really happened when Hurricane Irma whipped for hours the St. Thomas-St. John District, leaving St. Croix mostly unscathed, because she was frantically trying to save her life.

"I was too frightened to study about story; I was just trying to hide myself behind the bed," she told The Consortium. She was alone then, and alone as of Tuesday, and was convinced that she was forgotten by V.I.H.A. and the government. "

According to Mr. Mapp, V.I.H.A. will provide units it has available on St. Croix to the Tutu High Rise residents, and will make available over 100 vouchers for private property rentals. V.I.H.A. on Friday will release a telephone number asking landlords in St. Croix with available property, and who are part of the Section 9 program, to register their units immediately because of the urgency of the matter.

Here are the other updates from today's press conference:

Aside from Tutu High Rise, Mr. Bloomberg and Mr. Duncan also visited St. John, according to the governor, and after multiple conversations with residents on the smallest of the three main U.S. Virgin Islands, the men found the resilience of the St. Johnians, as well as their united front in helping each other, encouraging.

Mr. Duncan has raised several millions of dollars for the relief effort in the territory, and held a press conference -- along with the governor and Mr. Bloomberg -- at the Jet Center's east hanger, located at the Cyrille E. King Airport on Thursday afternoon (more on the press conference in an upcoming video).

Mr. Duncan will be in the territory until Sunday for his first post Hurricane Irma trip, according to the governor, as the NBA legend adds his considerable weight to the

recovery effort.

New York Governor Andrew Cuomo will be in the territory tomorrow, according to Mr. Mapp. Mr. Cuomo has pledged at least 27 state troopers to the security apparatus in the St. Thomas-St. John District. These troopers will arrive on Saturday.

WAPA's Hurricane Irma power restoration crews are back on duty after suffering the loss of lineman Jason Julius, 45. The company published [this](#) power restoration schedule, and anticipates that electricity will be fully restored to St. Croix by Sept. 21.

The governor said the situation at distribution centers, where workers were rationing supplies to residents, had changed. Now, each family will receive a minimum of one case of MREs (meals ready to eat), which includes 12 meals, and one case of water, which includes 12 liters of water.

The distribution of tarps has also improved, the governor said.

According to the Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency Director, Mona Barnes, two additional supplies distribution centers were installed in St. Thomas, bringing the island's total to five. Ms. Barnes also confirmed that 12 additional trailers with food, commodities and other goods had arrived in the territory.

Ms. Barnes said the United States Army Corps of Engineers would be helping families with the installation of tarps.

Virgin Islands Police Department Commissioner, Delroy Richards, said the level of violence in the St. Thomas-St. John District was down, and that the V.I.P.D. would continue to play its role of protecting residents. He also welcomed the additional help from the joint operations, as well as the state troopers set to arrive in the territory on Saturday.

Adjutant General Deborah Howell said so far military personnel of 15 states are represented in the territory, with personnel from Alabama, Tennessee, Kentucky and Puerto Rico set to arrive in St. Thomas on Saturday. Their presence will add 300 soldiers to the already sizable U.S. Military presence. Additional logistic assistance will soon be available to the local effort as well, she said.

"Excited about what's happening," said the adjutant general. "The improvements that are happening are so vast; the herculean effort could not be matched by anyone else."

The governor said 1,000 tourists on St. Croix were having difficulty returning to their homes, and arrangements were being made with Delta Airlines for chartered flights. Similar efforts will be replicated in St. Thomas, Mr. Mapp said.

Lieutenant Governor Osbert Potter will activate his role of commissioner of insurance to ensure, among other priorities, that adjusters are properly licensed. "They're coming into the territory and he has to sit with the major carriers to determine how they're going to proceed providing adjusting services, so claims could be assessed early so rebuilding could happen quickly," the governor said.

Department of Health Commissioner Michelle Davis said an Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC), is coming from New Jersey and is expected in the territory within the next 24-36 hours. It consists of 40 individuals and equipment, including 26 EMTs and paramedics. It will also include six ambulances and eight mental health staff. EMAC is a mutual aid agreement between states and territories of the United States. It enables states to share resources during natural and man-made disasters, including terrorism.

Beneficiaries of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or food stamp, who will be eligible to receive SNAP replenishment if they were without power for four hours during the storm. These SNAP recipients don't have to report the length of time they were without power to the Dept. of Human Services (D.H.S.), as WAPA has already issued certificates to D.H.S. affirming the power outage times and duration. In light of this, D.H.S. will initiate an automatic replenishment to SNAP cards, and will issue a press release to advise beneficiaries, according to Mr. Mapp.

FEMA's massive response to Hurricane Irma is continuing to grow, according to William Vogel, federal coordinating officer of FEMA Region II. The federal agency is bringing more people, equipment, supplies and commodities to the territory.

Mr. Vogel said search and rescue operations are continuing to assure that food, water and other basic needs (including shelter), are supplied. So far 1,140 people have been rescued, and the effort will continue as long as it's needed, said Mr Vogel.

To date, FEMA has distributed more than 582,000 meals, 380,000 liters water, 13,000 sheets, or heating covers, including tarps, 150 roles of blue tarps, and 30 generators, among other items.

Roughly 1,872 people have so far registered for federal individual assistance.