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# La Soufriere Volcanic Eruption Leaves 'Entire Population' of St. Vincent Without Clean Water, UN Says

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**Ashfall is the most far-reaching and pervasive volcanic hazard and the impact can linger for years after. By. PROF ROBERTSON, UWI-SRC.**

UNITED NATIONS, CMC – The United Nations said last week’s eruption of La Soufrière volcano in St. Vincent and the Grenadines has left the entire population of the main island without clean water and electricity.

Citing reports from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Stéphane Dujarric, said that about 20,000 people on the Caribbean island are currently in need of shelter.

“The eruption has affected most livelihoods in the northern part of the island, including banana farming, with ash and lava flows hampering the movement of people and goods,” he said.

The UN said that although the volcano had been dormant since 1979, it started spewing smoke and actively rumbling in December.

La Soufrière erupted last Friday, blanketing mainland St. Vincent in a layer of ash and forcing some 16,000 residents to evacuate their homes to safer parts of the island.

Emphasizing that access to the island is limited, Dujarric said that, along with the Barbados-based Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA), the UN has mobilized pre-positioned water and sanitation hygiene supplies, currently stored in nearby Barbados.

Over the weekend, the UN Secretary-General spoke to St. Vincent and the Grenadines Prime Minister Dr. Ralph Gonsalves, and the UN said the government officially asked for UN assistance.

The aid includes relief items, food and cash distribution, and technical advice, while neighboring countries are contributing emergency supplies and assets to support evacuation, according to Dujarric.

Meanwhile, OCHA reported that intervals between tremors have lasted between 1.5 to 3 hours, which, based on visual observations and satellite imagery, are associated with periods of explosive activity or enhanced venting of the volcano.

“Explosions and accompanying ashfall of similar or larger magnitude are likely to continue to occur over the next few days,” stated the UN humanitarian office.

At the request of the Prime Minister, the UN said it has also mobilized experts through the UN Environmental Program (UNEP) to develop and implement a debris management plan, including to clean up ash, and to promote environmental health and safety.

At the same time, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) said it has mobilized to help the island respond to eruption activities.

PAHO, through its Eastern Caribbean office, based in Barbados, said it is coordinating with Vincentian authorities to identify critical needs, and is supporting the Ministry of Health with technical advice on enforcement of public health measures, and with shipments of 150,000 medical masks, other personal protective equipment, medical supplies and test kits.

PAHO said it has already provided 60,000 medical masks, 7,000 respirators and 6,000 gowns to Barbados Defense Force emergency medical team to support a possible deployment of their military to perform emergency response activities.

“Evacuation and shelter operations elevate the risk for SARS-CoV-2 virus spread,” PAHO warned, adding that officials are administering COVID-19 vaccines and rapid antigen tests to determine active infection before entering facilities.

PAHO said St. Vincent and the Grenadines has reported 1,766 COVID-19 cases since the start of the pandemic among its approximately 110,000 inhabitants.

