



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **NEMA Urges Public to Make Preparations for 2020 Atlantic Hurricane Season Amidst COVID-19 Fight**

NASSAU, The Bahamas - The National Emergency Management Agency, NEMA, is gearing up its mandate – which is ensuring that adequate preparedness and mitigation measures, and response and recovery mechanisms, are in place as it prepares to navigate through the upcoming 2020 Atlantic Hurricane Season.

Theme for this season is: “Building A Disaster Resilient Bahamas”

**#2020HurricaneSeasonPrepareYourSpace**

**#FightCOVID-19**

The Director of NEMA, Captain Stephen Russell, is urging the public to make preparations, especially since the devastation caused by Hurricane Dorian in September 2019.

“We are still very much aware of the 2019 Hurricane Season, which saw Hurricane Dorian as an extremely powerful and devastating Category 5 Hurricane that became the most intense storm on record to hit The Bahamas. It is also regarded as the worst natural disaster in our country’s history,” Captain Russell said.

The fourth named storm of the season, Dorian struck Abaco and its Cays on September 1, 2019 with maximum sustained winds of 185 miles per hour. The storm went on to strike Grand Bahama at similar intensity, stalling just north of the area with unrelenting winds for at least 24 hours.

Dorian left catastrophic results in its wake. Most structures were severely damaged or destroyed. Some were swept out to sea. Thousands were left homeless; there were 74 official deaths; and there was an estimated \$3.4 billion in damage and losses.

“So, as we prepare for the 2020 Hurricane Season, which spans June 1 to November 30, several major forecasting centres are predicting a more active than usual season,” Captain Russell noted.

**Bahamas Department of Meteorology:**

The Bahamas Department of Meteorology has observed that an above average 2020 Atlantic Basin Hurricane Season is forecast, based on Colorado State University predictions:

- 16 named storms;
- 8 of which are to reach hurricane strength; and,
- 4 of these hurricanes are expected to develop into major hurricanes.

“A very strong indicator or influence on the cyclone activity during the season is sea surface temperatures. And the sea surface temperatures east of The Bahamas and in the Caribbean Sea are already quite warm (80°F/27°C) – since late March,” said Trevor Basden, Director, Bahamas Department of Meteorology.

“You are reminded that these seasonal forecasts only give you an idea of how active a season is expected to be. But we in The Bahamas are easily reminded that all it takes is one system to make landfall to result in loss of life and much, much destruction.”

The Ministry of Disaster Preparedness, Management and Reconstruction, along with its agencies the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) and the Disaster Reconstruction Authority (DRA) are coordinating a joint national hurricane preparedness and response plan for the 2020 Atlantic Hurricane Season, along with other state organizations and Non-Governmental Organizations, in order to maximize all resources available during the season.

**Disaster Reconstruction Authority:**

The Disaster Reconstruction Authority (DRA) is responsible for the management of reconstruction and restoration in areas designated disaster zones. The DRA Act was enacted by Parliament in 2019 in response to the widespread devastation of Hurricane Dorian to the Northern Bahamas.

Among its many tasks managing the disaster zones, the DRA has focused on assisting residents of Abaco, the Cays and Grand Bahama with temporary housing and home repairs.

Hurricane Dorian caused extensive damage to the Northern Bahamas. Temporary housing and home restoration are essential in preparation for the 2020 hurricane season.

The DRA launched its Small Home Repair Programme web portal on February 10, 2020. Since then, up to May 1, 2020, 4,181 user profiles were created. Of the 4,181 user profiles, 2,820 people registered for the programme by completing the full registration process online.

Of the 2,820 homeowners registered, 1,920 homeowners were approved: 1,404 for Grand Bahama, and 519 for Abaco. There are 433 homeowners who need to submit additional documents for their applications. The DRA is aggressively following up with these people to

assist them with the process. There were 252 people who were rejected, as they did not meet the criteria.

Up to May 1, 758 purchase orders were generated: 491 for Grand Bahama, and 267 for Abaco. Purchase orders are issued for residents to secure home repair supplies.

The DRA on April 2, 2020 handed over temporary housing domes in Spring City, Abaco. The DRA erected 32 domes in Spring City. These domes are temporary residences for displaced residents while they rebuild or repair their homes.

The state-of-the-art domes can accommodate four to six people. According to the manufacturer, they are built for extreme environments, able to withstand 180-mile-per-hour winds and have a functional life of 40 years to 50 years.

Forty domes will be issued to East End, Grand Bahama residents. More than 100 domes are en route to Abaco for other displaced residents of the mainland and Cays.

**Conclusion:**

The steps toward hurricane preparedness, awareness and mitigation will be rolled out in the midst of the fight against COVID-19. As the protocol still calls for a number of safety measures, including physical distancing, the national approach to hurricane awareness and management will take on a more virtual strategy.

Inspection of designated emergency shelters is nearing completion. Leaders of the Emergency Support Function groups and the disaster consultative committees have met virtually to discuss the level of readiness in all sectors. Moreover, Family Island disaster committees headed by Family Island Administrators are also coordinating community efforts for the upcoming hurricane season.

“The public at large is being urged to heed advisories issued through NEMA and other relevant authorities as we navigate through the hurricane season and continue the fight against COVID-19,” Captain Russell stressed.

Members of the public are also advised to carry out their hurricane preparedness for their households. Such steps include: inspection and/or installation of hurricane shutters; storage of emergency supplies like water and non-perishable food items; securing important documents in protective shields; keeping medicine in stock; having cash on hand, and other measures.

Already, Tropical Storm Arthur became the first named storm of 2020; on Sunday, May 17 forming 16 days before the formal start of a hurricane season.

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