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NEWS

Two Years After Hurricane Dorian, Bahamians On Abaco Are Still Trying To Recover

BY HOWARD CAMPBELL

It's been one year already since The Bahamas suffered colossal damage due to Hurricane Dorian's September 1st-3rd, 2019, reign of terror.

With sustained winds of 185 miles per hour, Hurricane Dorian is the most devastating force of nature to hit The Bahamas. Major centers like Nassau, the capital, and Freeport in Grand Bahama were hard-hit. But when it made landfall, the Abaco Islands were first to feel the brunt.

Two years later, residents there are still picking up the pieces. Martha Fleury, an American who has lived in Abaco for many years, lost her home in Treasure Cay, where she and her husband first visited 20 years ago. Its scenic landscape attracted them; they are now currently building another house in Abaco. "Most areas in Abaco are still struggling to recover from the destruction of Dorian as well as from the impact of COVID-19, she told Caribbean Today. "Due to the



Two years later, residents on the island of Abaco in The Bahamas, are still rebuilding following the devastation of Hurricane Dorian. (Abacostrong.org image)

fact that Abaco is a tourist-driven economy, the influx of money is greatly diminished. There is a significant amount of construction, however the pace is slow and is hampered by slow supply chains, and lack of funding."

Fleury said, "food security is still an issue, and jobs are hard to come by."

"In many communities, there is still a lack of infrastructure such as drinking water, sewage

service, schools, healthcare, and other community resources," revealed the president of Abaco Strong, a non-profit organization committed to restoring stability to the area, which has a population of just over 17,000.

Officially incorporated in January 2020, Abaco Strong is among several

initiatives formed in The Bahamas following Hurricane Dorian. It has 20 members, comprising local businesspeople, and expatriates from the United States and Canada.

Treasure Cay, its largest community, is home to an estimated 100 families. Their rebuilding effort is driven by grants from organizations such as Lyford Cay Charitable Trust,

Treasure Cay Community Foundation, and Rotary Club of The Bahamas.

Fleury, a mother of four children, worked for many years with Xerox. A Maryland resident, she has been a communications manager with non-profit organizations in the US, which made her a shoo-in for the post of President with Abaco Strong.

"Our goals are primarily long-term, in terms of rebuilding sustainable communities," she said. "However, we have accomplished a lot in the last year. We have delivered over 300 mattresses and bed frames to families in need, supplied hundreds of meals, removed countless truckloads of debris, sponsored several community events for holidays and for community cleanup, repaired seven homes with three additional homes under construction that allow our families to return to their homes and to safe and healthy living conditions."

Dorian's devastation of The Bahamas cost an estimated \$3.4

billion. There was evacuation of over 6,000 homeless persons to Nassau while tourism, traditionally the country's largest source of foreign exchange, was temporarily shut down.

The government was still struggling to make ends meet when news of a mystery virus called COVID-19 began making the rounds in early 2020. Finding resources to restore a battered economy and contain a pandemic that has to date claimed 523 lives as of press time, has been challenging.

Relief assistance has come from partners in CARICOM as well as Bahamian citizens who live in the US and Canada. But, two years later, more help is needed to help residents cope and build back better, the mantra that has become one those in hurricane prone areas have come to embrace but fear.

(Written and reported by Howard Campbell; Edited By Felicia J. Persaud)

