Cuba Tackles Housing Reconstruction after Devastating Tornado

07/02/2019

Reconstruction works and the delivery of construction materials advance speedily for the recovery of thousands of houses that were either destroyed or damaged by the destructive tornado that battered areas of five municipalities of Havana, Construction Minister Rene Mesa asserted.

The official appeared last night on national television accompanying President Miguel Diaz-Canel for an update on recovery works from the devastation caused by the tornado on the night of January 27, the first ever to hit Havana on its 500 years of existence.

Mesa said specialists visited 5,344 houses in the municipalities of Cerro, Diez de Octubre, Regla, Guanabacoa and Habana del Este, 4,812 of which already have their technical assessment for reconstruction or repair solutions.

According to Mesa, the violently devastating tornado with wind gusts of up to 400 kilometers, destroyed 500 houses and partially damaged 757, besides damaging roofs, water tanks, walls, windows and doors in the rest.

At the Round Table news hour, broadcast from the Palace of Government, the Minister detailed ongoing actions to overcome the huge damage. Some 370 tons of steel rods and wood, 1,500 roof panels, 30,000 roof tiles and doors and windows have been made available.

He explained that supplies are guaranteed from materials already in Havana and others coming from warehouses around the island. 'More than 900 families have received materials, while 289 of the serious cases have been resolved, a figure that will gradually grow,' Mesa pointed out.

Communication Minister Jorge Luis Perdomo reported that phone services, both land line and cell network, were damaged due to the power shortage and damages to infrastructure caused by the violent windstorm that snaked through the five municipalities along 20 kilometers in barely 20 minutes.

The tornado tumbled a 93 meter high tower for radio relay and damaged 27 radio-bases of mobile communication, as well as 23 public areas for wireless connection, known by locals as Wi Fi Parks, while 16,000 services are running with difficulties in the five municipalities, the Minister added.

Perdomo asserted that thanks to speedy team work technicians have been able to reestablish 97 percent of the services.

Energy Minister Raul Garcia praised the tough and hard work done by line and electrician crews that thanks to it power has been restored to all the damaged areas. In just three days, despite the huge destruction, the service had been restored to 97 percent of the affected areas.

Summarizing the presentations, President Diaz-Canel praised the enormous work and response by Havana authorities and people in general in the wake of the violent windstorm to save lives, attend to the most vulnerable and restore basic services.

The immediate toll was 4 dead and 195 wounded, however another 2 seriously injured victims perished to the wounds days after, raising the number of dead to 6. The tornado destroyed 500 houses and partially damaged 757. In all, some 4,812 suffered some kind of damage which the authorities have technically identified for problems to be solved.

In the midst of the windstorm a whole maternity hospital in the municipality of Diez de Octubre had to be urgently evacuated and mothers and their babies distributed among other medical centers in an impressively well-coordinated contingency rescue work.