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For more information contact:  
Neal Denton (202) 303-4371

**TESTIMONY OF KAREN E. HAGAN  
DISASTER OFFICER FOR THE STATE OF FLORIDA  
AMERICAN RED CROSS**

**Before the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure,  
Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings and Emergency  
Management  
*United States House of Representatives***

Chairwoman Norton, Congressman Diaz-Balart and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, I am honored to appear today on behalf of the American Red Cross. My name is Karen Hagan, and I am the American Red Cross Disaster Officer for the State of Florida.

For more than 125 years, our nation has relied on the American Red Cross in emergency situations. The Red Cross provides shelter, food, clothing, emotional and other support to those impacted by disasters in communities across the country and around the world. We supply nearly half of the nation's blood. We teach lifesaving skills to hundreds of thousands of people each year, and we support and provide invaluable resources to the members of the military and their families. Whether it is a hurricane or a heart attack, a call for blood or a call for help, the Red Cross is there.

The issue we are discussing today, preparedness for the 2009 hurricane season, which begins June 1, is very important to the American Red Cross and particularly important to me and my colleagues serving in the state of Florida. We appreciate your attention to this subject and are grateful to those colleagues and partners working together to help prepare Florida for the coming hurricane season.

Allow me to begin by saying this: The American Red Cross stands ready to respond to the 2009 hurricane season. We have reviewed and studied what we did well in the recent seasons and improved upon those successes. We have also taken a hard look at those areas where we must improve our response and we've addressed our shortcomings. Tropical Storm Fay affected the majority of Florida counties in the 2008 hurricane season. Over 1400 Red Crossers came to the aid of affected Floridians and the vast majority of those volunteers came from our Florida Red Cross Chapters. We opened 118 shelters with 21, 224 overnight stays and 372,919 meals and snacks.

The American people can continue to rely upon the Red Cross to deliver our promise of neighbor helping neighbor. Our legendary corps of volunteers is well trained and ready to help America. We are working closer than ever with our colleagues in the nonprofit, charitable and faith-based communities to expand our reach. We continue to improve our coordination with Federal, state and local officials. Here in Florida, the partnership with State and County

Emergency Management is very strong. From responding to single family fires to a major hurricane response, we keep our Emergency Management Partners informed and work along side of them to serve disaster survivors.

From its inception, we have been participating with our Federal, State, Community and faith-based partners in the Florida Catastrophe Planning efforts, following the path of a fictitious but plausible Hurricane Ono as it makes landfall along the southeast Florida Coast. We have had local, state and national Red Cross representatives involved in every stage of this planning effort, concentrating on mass care, sheltering and feeding, as well as family notification and reunification, post disaster relocation, case management and health and welfare workgroups.

I am very pleased to share with you today our plans for the coming season and our rejuvenated sense of urgency as we address our goals. For as we all know, the next disaster may not show up with advance warning on our weather radar screens. We can not wait for June 1 to be ready for disaster response. The American Red Cross remains on guard each day, everyday.

### **American Red Cross Services – What We Do In Times Of Disaster**

Our citizens rely on the American Red Cross to provide comfort and care during an emergency. Floridians in particular know that the American Red Cross will be there to provide the basics of food, shelter and a shoulder to lean on in times of disaster. But it is important to know the details of these services and I would like to take a moment to expand on them.

**Sheltering** – Shelters often become a focal point for the interaction between disaster victims and the community at large. They are a place of safety, refuge and comfort for many. When a family or individual walks through the door of a shelter operated or supported by the Red Cross, they can expect food, a safe place to sleep, mental health support and access to some basic first aid and health care. The Red Cross often uses congregate sheltering in facilities such as schools, churches, or other large facilities as shelters for individuals or families. Those shelters may be opened in anticipation of a disaster, during an evacuation, or after a disaster occurs. The Red Cross usually initiates sheltering activities in coordination with government and/or emergency management or with other community organizations.

In Florida we are prepared to support and manage Hurricane Evacuation Centers where we bring people out of harms way as well as shelters where we provide the types of services listed above.

We coordinate all of our shelter operations with our government partners. The State of Florida has adopted the American Red Cross National Shelter System as their official State Shelter Database. Subsequently, during a tropical event, we are able to provide both responders as well as Floridians with a public site – [floridadisaster.org](http://floridadisaster.org) – that can direct people to open shelters. In partnership with the Florida Department of Health, we also indicate the open Special Medical Needs shelters. We are also committed to the important work of moving people out of the shelter environment – which really serves as a lifeboat – and into transitional and long term housing. This is where our communities truly depends on the partnerships with Federal, state and local government.

**Feeding** – In addition to feeding efforts at shelters, the Red Cross also meets this basic need through mobile distribution and fixed feeding sites in affected areas for people who cannot travel to a shelter or choose to stay in their homes. Emergency workers or other groups providing disaster relief need meals as well and the local chapter or disaster relief operation can choose to provide feeding services to those groups. Mobile feeding is critical to meeting the immediate

needs of affected communities and establishing the presence of Red Cross relief efforts. Red Cross workers drive through damaged neighborhoods delivering meals, snacks and beverages to people returning to and cleaning up damaged homes.

**Bulk Distribution** – In some disasters, essential items clients need to assist their recovery might not be immediately available in the local area. In such cases, the Red Cross distributes comfort kits, clean up kits, shovels, insect repellent, or other things that may be needed.

**Disaster Mental Health Services** – Red Cross workers provide mental health services wherever a client is in need. Our mental health workers are always present at shelters, feeding sites and aid stations. They also travel with caseworkers and console families at hospitals and in disaster affected neighborhoods where clean up and rebuilding is taking place. Red Cross mental health volunteers are licensed mental health professionals and often work with practitioners in the community to provide services where the need is greatest.

**Client Casework** – Disaster victims often need the type of one-on-one advocacy our caseworkers can provide. In the complex world of disasters, it is often hard to know where to get help and how to start on the road to recovery. Red Cross caseworkers are skilled in matching a client's needs with the resources available in the community and then advocating on behalf of the client to access those resources. Caseworkers can also help their clients with wellness issues such as replacing lost medication or damaged medical equipment.

**Safe And Well Information** – Red Cross workers help concerned family members understand how they can communicate with their loved ones during an emergency. Within the disaster affected area and through the use of tools like our *Safe and Well* website, the Red Cross helps individuals and family members to communicate with family and friends outside of the affected area.

### **Outreach To People With Disabilities**

In developing mass care and sheltering capacity throughout the community, the American Red Cross is making it a priority nationwide to ensure that services and shelters are as accessible as possible to people with disabilities. Our Red Cross chapters work closely with their county Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) offices on disability issues as well other expert organizations. To that end we have been taking a number of steps including:

- Reviewing all our shelters for accessibility
- Providing training developed by the American Red Cross in conjunction with our State Disability Coordinator to Red Cross chapters, the Florida Association of Centers for Independent Living and local Emergency Management in order that they might be able to survey a building for accessibility and compliance with all ADA regulations
- Identifying in general, and on specific location levels, how we can best set up our shelters to be more accommodating. This includes training on *Disability Etiquette* that the American Red Cross in partnership with Volunteer Florida and the Florida Association of Centers for Independent Living developed for shelter managers and workers.
- Working with other subject matter experts (including experts from FEMA, State Emergency Management, our State Disability Coordinator, and the State Department of Health) to identify specific items that need to be available in shelters to make them more accessible to people with disabilities. Based on those recommendations, we have pre-stocked accessible cots, shower stools and commode chairs in some of our warehouses.

We carefully analyze the demographics of our very diverse state in our response planning. From our training to our casework to public messaging, everything we do is in Spanish and much of it is also in Creole. With our other chapter partners, we are working to coordinate and expand our language bank to be sure that we have the capacity to effectively communicate with those with limited skills in English. Here in Miami/Dade, our local volunteers are 75-85% bilingual – mostly Spanish/English but also many who are bilingual in Creole as well.

### **Government, Nonprofit and Other Partner Collaboration**

In Florida, as is the case across the country, the American Red Cross staffs the state and local Emergency Operation Center(s) (EOC) with Red Cross Government Liaisons who collaborate with their government and nonprofit agency counterparts. This staffing provides a direct link between the government agency most directly responsible for the event and the Red Cross and the resources that we can bring to support that government agency.

The Red Cross takes a lead role in actively working with the local VOADs (Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster), which are coalitions of independent voluntary agencies that meet regularly to ensure a coordinated community response that addresses the needs of victims and minimizes overlap of services in the event of a disaster.

To ensure effective disaster readiness and response, the Red Cross has established relationships with partner community agencies. While our national headquarters seeks out and negotiates partnerships with national-level agencies and organizations, our local chapters make those partnerships come alive by establishing and nurturing local relationships. Besides the VOAD partnerships, we look to Americorps, CERT (Community Emergency Response Teams), the Florida General Baptist Association, the NAACP and many other faith-based groups in times of disaster.

### **American Red Cross: Ready for 2009**

In our efforts to continuously prepare for the coming season, I am pleased to share our ongoing efforts with you:

- **Supplies:** We have expanded pre-positioning supply inventory to support feeding and sheltering for 500,000 people. This includes a stock of six million ready to eat meals, representing a capacity of one million meals for six days. We also have more than 48,000 potential shelter locations now listed in the National Shelter System.
- **Technological Improvements:** We have upgraded our IT systems to improve greater controls over financial management and can more easily share shelter and client information with our partners.
- **Improved Relationships:** Our Disaster Field Structure is aligned by state and provides a point of contact and integration of plans with other Federal and state officials across the country. We rely upon this robust network to provide field support, performance improvement, strategic project management and federal disaster relations.
- **Communications:** We have pre-positioned communications equipment and supplies in 48 cities in high-risk states including Florida.

- Logistics: We have built a more effective logistics, supply chain and inventory control system and are more engaged with NORTHCOM, the Defense Logistics Agency (DLA) and FEMA's logistics teams.
- Volunteers: We have more than 80,000 people in disaster response database, 93% of which are volunteers.
- There are other improvements post-Katrina that will ensure improved response from the Red Cross to those we serve, including:
  - Creation of the National Shelter System
  - Enhancements to the Coordinated Assistance Network (CAN)
  - Better coordination with other nonprofit partners and agencies
  - Refinements to the *Safe and Well* website
  - Redesign of the Shelter Intake Form in conjunction with DHS to better evaluate health needs of shelter residents

### **Closing Remarks**

My fellow Floridians and I are privileged to live in one of the most beautiful places in the world. Because the winds often blow hardest in our beautiful state, we also know it is an awesome responsibility to ensure that Florida is the most prepared place on the planet. I am confident that the plans, processes and partnerships that we have in place with our Federal, state, local, nonprofit and private sector partners will result in a proud and strong response from Red Crossers in this region and around the country.

Thank you for your time and attention. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.