

The impacts of Hurricane Sandy on the UN premises by USG Takasu

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At the outset, I would like to express deep sympathy to delegations, delegates and staff and their families who have suffered damages and encountered various difficulties in everyday life from the Hurricane Sandy.

The extreme weather event caused unprecedented severe damages on the extended areas from last Monday to Tuesday. UNHQ premises were not exceptions.

In accordance with UN emergency management framework, under the guidance of the SG and DSG, the Crisis Operations Group (COG) led the effort to address emergency response to this unprecedented natural disaster.

As the lead department of emergency management system, the Offices of DM (OCSS, CMP, OICT, OHRM and OPPBA), together with DSS, have taken precautionary measures and made every effort to ensure business continuity and speedy recovery of functionalities of UNHQ. DSS/Operation center, DPKO/situation center, OICT network operation center continued to function throughout the storm without interruption.

The staff - in particular facilities management, CMP, ICT, and safety and security, situation centers - worked around the clock preparing for and responding to the aftermath of the storm. Even three days when the HQ was not open because of safety concern, the UN global services were provided without break. Their efforts are much appreciated and I would like to pay tribute to them – without them business continuity would not have been possible.

Our overriding considerations are (1) to ensure safety of delegates and staff, and (2) to resume normal operation on UNHQ facilities as earliest as possible with minimum disruption of work.

1. Preparedness

DM (OCSS and CMP) and DSS coordinated a series of actions prior to the event and took preparedness actions that significantly reduced the damage to the UN facility. Storm preparations started on Thursday, 25 October. All storm preparations were taken including removal or securing of any exterior items that could have become airborne. Susceptible areas to flooding were protected by sandbags.

The weather predictions for the severity of the storm and storm surge were raised as the storm approached. The storm surge is estimated to reach 14 feet above the normal level and the ingress of flood waters up to 3rd basement could not be abated. The other exterior preparations were successful. There was no damage from moving or flying items.

2. Extent of damages;

There are so far no reports of injuries to Staff member and/or dependant. But we are aware that some staff and our colleagues at the permanent missions have had to move out their home and suffered damages on property, although we do not yet know full extent of the damages.

Despite the severity of unprecedented storm and flooding, material damages in the UN compound are relatively contained as a result of effective precautionary measures. The core infrastructure of the HQ premises is assessed as being intact. Only the Arrival Tent at the delegate's entrance and roof cover of the GA hall were destroyed and will require to be dismantled. Currently, the Delegates Entrance to the GA Hall is inaccessible.

Most serious damages are due to the effects of flooding, which went 14 feet above the normal level on Monday night. The basement up to 3B level of the General Assembly, Conference, Secretariat and North Lawn Buildings, approximately 350,000 square feet were flooded. The water covered the facilities at 3B, which include chiller rooms, garage parking and offices such as receiving and inspection, facilities management, transport, mail, printing plant, etc. (approximately 60,000 square feet).

Both the main and temporary HVAC Chiller plants (3 B) were flooded and we had to shutdown of the cooling system.

Electricity switchboard was also flooded and a small fire started.

For safety reason to prevent spread of fire, a complete power shutdown was instituted in the Secretariat building from Monday 7:00 pm to Tuesday 7:00 pm (together with South Annex and Library Buildings); (ConEd power was supplied but we switched off for safety concern.)With regard to the CMP warehouse located in New Jersey, we are still assessing how finished materials stored in the warehouse were impacted.

3. ICT

As result of the shutdown of the cooling system, the Primary Data Center became overheated and had to be shutdown on Monday night. Due to the rapidity of the shutdown, difficulties were experienced in the fail over of the system and migration of programs to the Secondary Data Center in NJ (email is automatically moved to the SDC but some programs such as blackberry server, IMIS, requires manual migration); thus, some communications systems (data and phones) were severely affected.

On Tuesday, the engineers succeeded in shortcutting electrical connection with temporary chiller system, which made the primary data center cooled down and resumed server support. The internet, phone and WIFI started to function in all buildings including NLB on Tuesday. In the Secretariat, too, the system was in function by Thursday. The blackberry speed was initially slow for a while because of backlog accumulated during Monday/Tuesday.

The programs, which moved to the secondary data center such as email and blackberry immigrated back to the primary data center on Thursday. The SDC is meant primarily to keep data such as procurement, medical record, etc. During this event, no data was lost and the SDC proved to be its utility.

4. Access to and operation of the UNHQ

Until the main Chiller system is in place, the GA building (plenary hall and the Security Council rooms) has to operate without AC support. The Security

Council rooms receive fresh air from air dampers in the walls.

North Lawn Building is basically unaffected and conference rooms as well as office spaces are intact. The SC had a meeting in NLB on Wednesday. On Thursday and Friday, the GA plenary, and several main committees had meetings, taking into account availability of support staff.

As regards the Secretariat building, checking of fire safety and elevator was completed on Wednesday. But because of water pumping capability, which can reach only up to 17th floor in case of fire, COG decided to open only up to 17th floor on Thursday (other essential staff above 17th floor may work in CR1 or 15th conference floor hotdesking.) After testing fire safety and water supply at higher floors, the entire building is open on Friday.

The Library (also media and press conference room) and South Annex Building is also operational from Thursday.

5. Communication to staff and delegations

Throughout the emergency, the Secretariat made every effort to communicate updated information to staff and delegations.

On late Monday night to Tuesday early morning, by the fail-over from the primary to the secondary data centre, server connectivity was maintained. However, because the switch was done in a rush, the database of addresses of permanent missions was corrupted, which impeded our ability to send email Broadcasts-UNHQ. As a result, the information of closure of office for Wednesday through Broadcast-UNHQ went to the staff but regrettably not to delegations on Tuesday evening (30 October).

At the same time, information was regularly provided through the website titled as “UN staff emergency information” and the hot line. The website and hot line are accessible not only by staff but also by delegates. In addition, the DSG informed the PGA about the closure.

We think it necessary to improve communication to the staff and delegations in emergency; such as standard operation manual, multiple channels to disseminate information by Broadcast email, website, hotline, text message and social media.

ICT connectivity and migration to secondary data center should be improved; such as standard operation manual and regular drill by the staff.

While there were some connectivity issues in the fail-over due to the rapidity of the shutdown in the PDC on Monday night to early Tuesday, the back-up system for ICT provided by the secondary data center was essential to allow us to continue operations. If we did not have the SDC, communications would have totally collapsed and data loss to critical corporate systems would have been overwhelming.

I would like to thank the General Assembly for approving the establishment of the Secondary Data Centre, which was crucial to us.

6. Need of repair works and financial costs

The costs to replace roof top plastic wrap and repair entrance of the GA Hall would be insignificant.

The main Chiller cooling system will require replacement of damaged electrical system, which is likely to take a few months. However, it is not expected to impact on the overall schedule of CMP completion. We expect the primary work could be covered by insurance.

Some parts of electricity switchboard need to be repaired or replaced. In the facilities occupied by the staff at 3rd basement, desks, equipments, supplies and materials were damaged by the flood. Their offices are being relocated temporarily to other space.

Printing shop and equipments were also damaged, including leased digital printers, which produced 95-99% of all the official documentations.

DGACM/Printing Section has made emergency alternative arrangement with the vendor as well as staff for printing documents required for meetings.

Full assessment on cost estimates of damages is too early to be determined at this point. Parts of the basement are still under examination and we are in the middle of assessing the totality of damages and in the process of discussing with insurance firms and contractors. The process of full assessment will potentially also have to be done in consultation with Insurance unit in phases. The process will require some time to complete.

7. Conclusion

I would like to state that the UN **Emergency Management Framework did work.**

- a. Pre-event preparedness significantly reduced the damage to the facility from flooding, saving money and reducing recovery time.
- b. With focused investment in business continuity, staff support, crisis management and disaster recovery, the Secretariat was able to continue critical operations and quickly recover from the significant disruption caused by Hurricane Sandy.
- c. In accordance with the Emergency Management Framework, we coordinated emergency response and harmonized decision-making through the Crisis Operations Group, chaired by the DSS and attended by all offices concerned. We could ensure that all elements of emergency management were mutually supporting and effectively implemented.
- d. By the dedicated efforts by our staff, the UN global services with overseas duty stations continued without interruption, even three days when the HQ offices were not open because of safety assurance.
- e. The Security Council held a meeting on Wednesday, the day after the storm; on Thursday, two days after the storm, the Secretariat was able to support plenary and main committee meetings, and most Secretariat facilities are up and running on Thursday and fully functioning on Friday.

- f. Although there were some connectivity problems from complications during the failover during Monday night to Tuesday morning stemming from the severity of the flooding, the Secondary Data Centre allowed us to maintain critical IT systems and communication continuity, with no data lost.
- g. Throughout the storm, updated messages were communicated to the staff and delegations by using a combination of Broadcast-UNHQ email, dedicated website and hotline. It is recognized that communication with Member States need to be improved, and we have taken steps to address this issue. We are already taking a measure to modify the UN staff info website, which will be renamed the UN emergency info website.
- h. We still face two challenges to return to business as usual:
- The staff support; those staff who suffered damages to restore normal working condition as early as possible; and
 - The repair of the damaged facilities and equipments such as main chilling plant.
- i. The extreme nature of the event highlighted areas in UN emergency management program that need improvement. The Secretary-General tasked a senior-level task force under the chairmanship of CdC with USG/DM, DSS, etc to examine lesson learned and additional emergency response steps to enable us to become more resilient as an organization in the future.

Thank you, Mr.Chairman