

News story: HMS Ocean arrives in Caribbean to boost UK disaster relief effort

The ship arrived today with around 650 personnel and 60 tonnes of aid including construction equipment and other essential materials such as hygiene kits and water purification tablets.

Ocean's arrival means there are now over 2,000 UK military personnel working on the relief effort, making it the largest deployment of UK personnel anywhere in the world.

Defence Secretary, Sir Michael Fallon, said:

The sight of HMS Ocean dropping anchor in the British Overseas Territories will be welcome respite to those who have seen their islands battered by repeated hurricanes. Ocean will help support the longer-term reconstruction of the Caribbean islands which have been devastated by this unprecedented hurricane season.

The fact that this is our largest operation worldwide underlines the scale of the damage caused and the Government's commitment to UK citizens spread across the region and in need of our support.

In the coming days she will deliver aid and equipment where it is needed on the islands. She is then due to continue to other territories affected by this month's storms, as the Department for International Development (DFID) works with the Overseas Territories' Governments on a long term plan to get the islands back on their feet.

Commanding Officer of HMS Ocean, Captain Robert Pedre Royal Navy, said:

HMS Ocean stands ready to contribute her significant capabilities to the major UK effort already underway to provide humanitarian assistance and disaster relief to the Caribbean region.

We bring tonnes of aid, significant air and surface lift capacity and hundreds of highly skilled personnel including engineers, logisticians and medical professionals drawn from all three Services. My Ship's Company and embarked forces are highly trained and we are ready to make a real difference.

There are considerable military assets in the region supporting UK personnel in the relief effort. RFA Mounts Bay has been in region since July, responding to initial disaster relief effort.

Commanding Officer of RFA Mounts Bay, Captain Stephen Norris, said:

RFA Mounts Bay has been stationed in the Caribbean since July working with the Overseas Territories in preparation for the 2017 Hurricane season. The ships company and embarked forces, made up of disaster relief specialists and equipment, has been providing critical support to the Islands since Irma first struck on the 6th September.

My people have worked tirelessly on the herculean task to assist those effected, and are committed to continuing with the delivery of life supporting aid and to helping the local population with recovery and rebuilding.

There is also a C-130 aircraft and two Chinook helicopters providing tactical airlift operations, three Puma and a Wildcat helicopter conducting reconnaissance flights and helping to deliver supplies and aid. On board, HMS Ocean also carried three Wildcat Mk1, one Merlin Mk2, three Merlin Mk3 and two Chinook helicopters.

The UK has already committed £57m to the relief effort and are matching public commitments to the British Red Cross Appeal up to £3m, and so far 75 tonnes of much-needed humanitarian aid has arrived or been bought in the region.

International Development Secretary, Priti Patel, said:

The UK has acted without hesitation to get the right supplies to those whose lives have been torn apart by these catastrophic hurricanes. With 60 tonnes of aid arriving on HMS Ocean today we are almost doubling the amount of aid from the UK for the worst hit islands.

Ocean is bringing 5,000 hygiene kits, 10,000 water buckets and over 500,000 water purification tablets to provide more than 10 million litres of water, along with more troops to support our aid experts on the ground who are helping restore the lives of those who have lost everything.

There are also six FCO Rapid Deployment Teams in the region to work closely with the governments and 36 DFID aid experts on the ground working on immediate recovery and the long term humanitarian effort.