

# Jehovah's Witnesses and Disaster Relief





# Jehovah's Witnesses and Disaster Relief

**“Let us work what is good  
toward all.”**

*—Galatians 6:10*

Jehovah's Witnesses are well-known for sharing Bible teachings with others. They are also known for their organized global relief efforts to help fellow worshippers and others who suffer the effects of natural disasters, war, and other calamities. In planning and implementing relief efforts, they cooperate closely with government and local agencies. Witnesses consider it a privilege to serve their fellow man.

## DISASTER RELIEF ORGANIZATION

- **Quick Response.** Jehovah's Witnesses have a well-organized program for rapid victim assessment and relief. Local congregations quickly identify individuals and families in need. The Witnesses are able to mobilize tens of thousands of volunteers who are able to travel on short notice and participate in relief activities.
- **Skilled Workers.** Many Witness volunteers already have extensive disaster relief experience, including the collection and distribution of relief supplies, stabilization of properties, and reparation of homes. The Witnesses have the capacity to coordinate large numbers of volunteers worldwide for restoration work.
- **Self-Supported.** Disaster relief efforts are supported entirely by voluntary donations. All of the administrators and field workers are unpaid volunteers, and they do not receive a salary. To assist humanitarian and recovery efforts, relief centers are often set up in local Kingdom Halls or in larger Assembly Halls.



- **Emotional Support.** Jehovah's Witnesses make one-on-one pastoral visits on disaster victims to help them cope emotionally with trauma and loss. They comfort people with the Bible's promise that soon God will bring an end to all the tragedies that cause pain and suffering. Relief workers also help victims to resume regular attendance at religious meetings as soon as possible so that they can come together in a safe environment for mutual support, association, and recovery.





Jehovah's Witnesses in Nigeria deliver relief supplies to those affected by a disaster in 2002

## GLOBAL DISASTER RELIEF EFFORTS

- Japan:** On March 11, 2011, a magnitude 9.0 earthquake and powerful tsunami devastated Japan, and some 19,000 people were reported dead or missing. Within one day, the Witnesses delivered food, water, and fuel to victims. By March 13, three Disaster Relief Committees (DRCs) were formed. Witnesses throughout Japan offered temporary accommodations to survivors. The volunteers subsequently repaired 970 damaged homes and distributed furniture, appliances, and household goods.
- Hungary:** When unusually heavy rainfall caused rivers to flood in central Europe in June 2013, the Hungarian Ministry of Human Resources asked Jehovah's Witnesses for assistance in preventing flood damage along the Danube River. In response, more than 900 Witnesses took part in flood-prevention activities organized by local authorities and assisted in the work to reinforce the riverbanks.
- Philippines:** Super Typhoon Haiyan struck the Philippines on November 8, 2013. The death toll was 6,300; some 28,000 people were injured; and more than one million homes were damaged. Jehovah's Witnesses in Manila formed
- five DRCs to expedite assistance for victims. They provided temporary tents for Witnesses and others and sent more than 190 tons of supplies to the affected areas. Volunteers from at least ten countries assisted with the relief effort, providing medical support and rebuilding and repairing more than 2,000 homes.
- Nepal:** A devastating series of earthquakes took place in Kathmandu in 2015. The day after the first quake, Witness representatives visited the region to assess the needs. They arranged shelter in private homes, in Kingdom Halls, and in tents for those who had been displaced. Witness volunteers from India, Japan, and Nepal worked with the DRCs to erect temporary shelters and to provide food. A medical team provided medicine and utilized mobile surgical and intensive care equipment to treat patients.
- Malawi, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe:** On March 14, 2019, Cyclone Idai, one of the worst storms in the southern hemisphere, made land-fall in Mozambique and passed through Malawi and Zimbabwe. Roads and structures were destroyed, affecting more than 2.6 million people and causing more than 1,000 fatalities. Jehovah's Witnesses mobilized 14 DRCs to coordinate the relief work. Over 3,500 volunteers from Brazil, France, Italy, the United States, and several countries in Africa distributed approximately 430 tons of food and rebuilt or repaired 18 Kingdom Halls and more than 650 homes.
- Venezuela:** Because of deteriorating economic conditions, the Witnesses have formed 60 DRCs throughout the country to care for fundamental needs. The government recognized 80 Kingdom Halls as Social Programs Distribution Centers for food distribution. The Witnesses continue to coordinate relief efforts to supply basic necessities, distributing hundreds of tons of donated food and hygiene products each month.





### OBSERVATIONS ABOUT JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES' RELIEF WORK

The spirit and effectiveness of the Witnesses' relief activities are appreciated not only by those directly affected by the disasters but also by government officials and other relief personnel. Frequently, the authorities are willing to grant access permits to affected sites to Witness relief workers.

### BIBLE PRINCIPLES

"We should love . . . in deed and truth."

—1 John 3:18

"Do not withhold good from those to whom you should give it if it is within your power to help."

—Proverbs 3:27

*"Jehovah's Witnesses Accommodation Centers are some of the best organized, with new tents; some of these are large and strong and have mosquito netting on their doors and windows. This is far better than the houses that some lost."*

—O Público, regarding the relief work after Cyclone Idai struck Mozambique, March 24, 2019

*"Even though the principal goal of Jehovah's Witnesses is to spread the good news, they have also given practical assistance to those in need. I appreciate the big contribution that Jehovah's Witnesses have given after Hurricane Matthew. An intervention was necessary, and you did not just stay inside your church."*

—Smith Mathurin, deputy parliamentarian, acknowledging the Witnesses' relief efforts after Hurricane Matthew struck Haiti in 2016

*"The Jehovah's Witnesses were one of the first non-government groups to undertake a house-rebuilding initiative. . . . Words cannot fully express the appreciation and gratitude of my family and our people."*

—Ferdinand Martin G. Romualdez, representative of the First District of Leyte in the Philippines, regarding disaster relief work for victims of Typhoon Haiyan

*"The organizational structure of the Jehovah's Witnesses has developed the disaster response volunteer service to a fine art."*

—Waldron News, after a disaster struck the state of Arkansas, U.S.A., in 2013