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Resilient Ports Strengthen Hurricane Response

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As we approach the official opening of the Atlantic hurricane season on June 1st, it's a good time to pause and reflect on tough lessons learned. We have all witnessed the central role our Caribbean and Latin American airports and seaports serve in the wake of extreme weather, and the serious consequences that unfold when they are weakened. These ports must develop more resilience so they can better support recovery efforts in their communities.

A coalition of concerned leaders has formed a public-private partnership to apply lessons from the past to strengthen our ports for the future.

Strong, resilient airports and seaports are at the heart of effective response and recovery following a hurricane or other natural disaster. The tragic aftermath of Hurricane Georges demonstrated just what happens when ports fail. In 1998, Georges swept across the Caribbean as a category 4 hurricane, devastating Antigua and Barbuda, St. Kitts and Nevis, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Cuba, and the United States, causing 604 deaths and nearly \$6 billion in property damage.

Sadly, severely damaged ports greatly complicated the distribution of relief supplies and personnel, slowing the pace of life-saving humanitarian aid. Incapacitated or poorly-functioning ports further delayed the recovery of fragile island economies, creating a ripple effect that deepened the distress of stricken communities.

Since Georges, the lessons of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, as well as of the Haiti earthquake of 2010, have illustrated the full range of negative impacts that damaged ports have on relief efforts. Compromised airports and seaports seriously disable the local community--indeed the whole country or region--as the very crisis that injures the port impedes recovery. Critical medical and other evacuations are delayed. Delivery of badly-needed food and supplies is stalled. Trade slows or stops, businesses fail, jobs are lost, and revenue from duties, taxes, and tariffs declines.

A coalition of organizations that provided relief to Port-au-Prince following the Haiti earthquake have joined together to systematically apply the lessons learned from past disasters. They have created the Port Resiliency Program, or PReP, a public-private partnership that aims to work

with Caribbean and Latin American airports and seaports to strengthen their ability to respond to and recover quickly from a crisis.

PReP facilitates significant, cost-effective improvements by focusing on fortifying current capabilities and building on existing knowledge and relationships. The program assists ports in strengthening disaster plans, programs, and procedures through self assessment, peer assessment, gap analysis, targeted training, customized exercises, and aftercare.

In February, led by AmericasRelief Team and funded by FedEx, PReP completed a highly successful proof-of-concept pilot test at Las Americas International Airport in Santo Domingo. Other sponsors are joining FedEx to help bring this service to additional ports at no cost. MIA, FIU's International Center for Disaster Preparedness, American Airlines, PortMiami, and Smith-Woolwine Associates are among the many participants and sponsors supporting this important program.

PReP is based in Miami, a city with strong ties to the Caribbean and Latin American region. The program works closely with airports and seaports to guide them from where they are to where they want to be. Site visits foster support for employees and their families as well as interagency cooperation and mutual aid. In addition, PReP will fly in participants to attend workshops that incorporate best practices and continuous improvement to ensure optimal interoperability among personnel and agencies facing the complex challenges inherent in restoring ports after a crisis.

Miami is proud to be part of this effort to learn from our past experiences. This structured, functional port restoration program will standardize and streamline response, promoting timely repair and reopening of damaged ports and rapid restoration of normal trade activity. Strong, resilient ports protect vital assets and interests, and they help communities bounce back from disasters. But most of all, strong ports save lives.