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Barack Obama

Address at the American Red Cross on Hurricane Sandy

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Alright. First of all, I want to thank Gail and Charlie who are on the scene doing work every time we have a disaster here in the United States of America. But obviously, the Red Cross is doing outstanding work internationally, so we want to thank them for their outstanding work.

A few things that I want to emphasize to the public at the top. This storm is not yet over. We've gotten briefings from the National Hurricane Center. It is still moving north. There are still communities that could be affected. And so I want to emphasize there are still risks of flooding, there are still risks of down power lines, risks of high winds. And so it is very important for the public to continue to monitor the situation in your local community, listen to your state and local officials, follow instructions. The more you follow instructions, the easier it is for our first responders to make sure that they are dealing with true emergency situations. So the better prepared individual families are for the situation, the easier it is going to be for us to deal with it.

Next, obviously, I want to talk about the extraordinary hardship that we've seen over the last 48 hours. Our thoughts and prayers go out to all the families who have lost loved ones. Unfortunately, there have been fatalities as a consequence of Hurricane Sandy, and it's not clear that we've counted up all the fatalities at this point. And obviously, this is something that is heartbreaking for the entire nation. And we certainly feel profoundly for all the families whose lives have been upended and are going to be going through some very tough times over the next several days and perhaps several weeks and months.



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The most important message I have for them is that America is with you. We are standing behind you, and we are going to do everything we can to help you get back on your feet.

Earlier today I had a conversation with the governors and many of the mayors in the affected areas, including Governor Christie, Governor Cuomo, and Mayor Bloomberg. I want to praise them for the extraordinary work that they have done. Sadly, we are getting more experience with these kinds of big impact storms along the East Coast, and the preparation shows. Were it not for the outstanding work that they and their teams have already done and will continue to do in the affected regions, we could have seen more deaths and more property damage. So they have done extraordinary work working around the clock. The coordination between the state, local, and federal governments has been outstanding.

Obviously, we're now moving into the recovery phase in a lot of the most severely affected areas. New Jersey, New York in particular have been pounded by this storm. Connecticut has taken a big hit. Because of some of the work that had been done ahead of time, we've been able to get over a thousand FEMA officials in place, pre-positioned. We've been able to get supplies, food, medicine, water, emergency generators to ensure that hospitals and law enforcement offices are able to stay up and running as they are out there responding.

We are going to continue to push as hard as we can to make sure that power is up throughout the region. And obviously, this is mostly a local responsibility, and the private utilities are going to have to lean forward, but we are doing everything we can to provide them additional resources so that we can expedite getting power up and running in many of these communities.

There are places like Newark, New Jersey, for example, where you've got 80, 90 percent of the people without power. We can't have a situation where that lasts for days on end. And so my instructions to the federal agency has been, do not figure out why we can't do something; I want you to figure out how we do something. I want you to cut through red tape. I want you to cut through bureaucracy. There's no excuse for inaction at this point. I want every agency to lean forward and to make sure that we are getting the resources where they need - where they're needed as quickly as possible.

So I want to repeat -- my message to the federal government: No bureaucracy, no red tape. Get resources where they're needed as fast as possible, as hard as possible, and for the duration, because the recovery process obviously in a place like New Jersey is going to take a significant amount of time. The recovery process in a lower Manhattan is going to take a lot of time.

And part of what we're trying to do here is also to see where are some resources that can be brought to bear that maybe traditionally are not used in these kind of disaster situations. For example, there may be military assets that allow us to help move equipment to ensure that pumping and getting the flooding out of New York subway systems can proceed more quickly.



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There may be resources that we can bring to bear to help some of the private utilities get their personnel and their equipment in place more swiftly so that we can get power up and running as soon as possible.

So my message to the governors and the mayors and, through them, to the communities that have been hit so hard is that we are going to do everything we can to get resources to you and make sure that any unmet need that is identified, we are responding to it as quickly as possible. And I told the mayors and the governors if they're getting no for an answer somewhere in the federal government, they can call me personally at the White House.

Now, obviously, the state, local, federal response is important, but what we do as a community, what we do as neighbors and as fellow citizens is equally important. So a couple of things that I want the public to know they can do.

First of all, because our local law enforcement, our first responders are being swamped, to the extent that everybody can be out there looking out for their neighbors, especially older folks, I think that's really important. If you've got a neighbor nearby, you're not sure how they're handling a power outage, flooding, et cetera, go over, visit them, knock on their door, make sure that they're doing okay. That can make a big difference. The public can be the eyes and ears in terms of identifying unmet needs.

Second thing, the reason we're here is because the Red Cross knows what it's doing when it comes to emergency response. And so for people all across the country who have not been affected, now is the time to show the kind of generosity that makes America the greatest nation on Earth. And a good place to express that generosity is by contributing to the Red Cross.

Obviously, you can go on their website. The Red Cross knows what they're doing. They're in close contact with federal, state, and local officials. They will make sure that we get the resources to those families as swiftly as possible. And again, I want to thank everybody here who is doing such a great job when it comes to the disaster response.

The final message I'd just say is during the darkness of the storm, I think we also saw what's brightest in America. I think all of us obviously have been shocked by the force of Mother Nature as we watch it on television. At the same time, we've also seen nurses at NYU Hospital carrying fragile newborns to safety. We've seen incredibly brave firefighters in Queens, waist-deep in water, battling infernos and rescuing people in boats.

One of my favorite stories is down in North Carolina, the Coast Guard going out to save a sinking ship. They sent a rescue swimmer out, and the rescue swimmer said, "Hi, I'm Dan. I understand you guys need a ride." That kind of spirit of resilience and strength, but most importantly looking out for one another, that's why we always bounce back from these kinds of disasters.



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This is a tough time for a lot of people -- millions of folks all across the Eastern Seaboard. But America is tougher, and we're tougher because we pull together. We leave nobody behind. We make sure that we respond as a nation and remind ourselves that whenever an American is in need, all of us stand together to make sure that we're providing the help that's necessary.

So I just want to thank the incredible response that we've already seen, but I do want to remind people this is going to take some time. It is not going to be easy for a lot of these communities to recovery swiftly, and so it's going to be important that we sustain that spirit of resilience, that we continue to be good neighbors for the duration until everybody is back on their feet.

Thank you very much, everybody. Thank you, Red Cross.