

## Relief efforts in Suriname: “The main supply of food has gone.”



### UN chief visits Suriname and warns “we are still losing the battle of climate change” as 3,000 households are devastated by unprecedented flooding

UN Secretary General António Guterres has called for the world to [support and protect the rainforests and indigenous peoples of Suriname](#) affected by climate change. Across the nation, severe flooding across the nation has wiped out food supplies for at least 3,000 households.

Exceptionally heavy rainfall since the beginning of 2022 across seven of the ten districts in Suriname has caused more devastation than ever before, according to [AFP newswire](#). Humanitarian airline Mission Aviation Fellowship [MAF] is helping coordinate relief efforts on the ground using two Cessna aircraft. The NGO confirms the flooding has been unprecedented – devastating homes, crops and livelihoods.

Suriname’s president Chan Santokhi has called for urgent international assistance across Suriname’s ‘[disaster areas](#)’, and MAF is working together with Suriname’s disaster response agency National Coordinatie Centrum Rampen [NCCR] to deliver food aid by air where severe flooding prevents overland travel.

In a bid to distribute emergency supplies to the most isolated, MAF and NCCR have already fed over 200 families in the south of the country since the beginning of June. Relief flights conducted by three MAF pilots are set to continue throughout July, although the extreme weather is preventing MAF from landing safely in some areas.

Ongoing [research](#) has warned that deforestation in South America’s Guiana Shield rainforest – which covers almost all of Suriname’s landmass – will lead to increased rainfall across the region. According to [Global Forest Watch](#), 12.3kilohectres of Suriname’s rainforest – equivalent to 10.1 megatonnes of Co2 emissions – have been lost in the last decade, and these underreported 2022 floods reiterate that climate change is impacting some of the world’s most vulnerable communities.

According to MAF Suriname’s Office Manager Helmer Maas, the 2022 floods will lead to long-term food insecurity across the nation, with vast numbers of crops submerged under water. He admits that the current rainfall is the worst they’ve seen, even for Suriname’s annual wet season which occurs between April and August.

Helmer said: “In Suriname’s interior, crops are grown next to the rivers where people live. Rivers are their lifeline but burst riverbanks have completely destroyed the cassava harvest this year, so their main supply of food has gone. They can’t wait until early next year for their next harvest, Food supply is now a big issue.”

Helmer reports that many residents are no longer able to reach their villages by foot, so are resorting to small boats. Others cannot access health centres due to the floodwaters which are five meters deep in some areas.

On average, it takes MAF between 1 hour 30 minutes and 2 hours 15 minutes to fly from the capital Paramaribo to the remote villages which are worst affected by flooding. The equivalent journey by

land has no road access beyond Lake Brokopondo – one of the largest reservoirs in the world. Helmer said: “Depending on the water levels, it would take several days by boat and walking – it would be very challenging.”

Villagers in rural areas who would otherwise have been completely disconnected from the rest of their country, have flocked around MAF’s aircraft to receive emergency supplies.

He continued: “In the capital, many streets are flooded. People had to raise their beds and fridges at home, it’s the worst it’s ever been. On one journey, initially I thought the area wasn’t too bad – but the water was about half a metre deep. Whenever a truck passed by, water splashed right over my car. I was quite scared, the water came in faster than I expected and the engine could have died. But a broken down car is an inconvenience in the city – in remote areas there is a lot of poverty. When water floods their homes, they cannot replace them. The situation is really bad.”

Colonel Slijngard from NCCR said: “We are very grateful for the cooperation and security MAF brings in the distribution of food aid. Without these flights, it would be a big problem delivering these essential packages. Without MAF, it could take three days to reach some of these villages.”

Heavy rain is expected to continue until mid-August, which could cause additional challenges for MAF to land safely on soddened grass airstrips.

Helmer concludes: “If there is too much rain, the authorities close the airstrips, which unfortunately happened on a recent flight to Tepoe which we had to delay because the airstrip was simply too wet to land. These people could not receive their food aid. For the cut-off communities dependent on outside help, airbridges and MAF flights are vital for food to reach people when there is no harvest.”

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## Notes to editor

A collection of images of MAF’s relief efforts and work in Suriname may be accessed here:

[https://mafuk-my.sharepoint.com/:f/g/personal/jo\\_lamb\\_maf-uk\\_org/EmYamkHZAkJHs8pKiRADslcBa6CMIP04xN6n2dJcCEQSyQ?e=mmsbUP](https://mafuk-my.sharepoint.com/:f/g/personal/jo_lamb_maf-uk_org/EmYamkHZAkJHs8pKiRADslcBa6CMIP04xN6n2dJcCEQSyQ?e=mmsbUP)

## MAF

Millions of people cannot access basic medical care, clean water, food or education, simply because it’s too dangerous or time-consuming to reach them. Mission Aviation Fellowship (MAF) provides flights for over 1,500 aid, development and mission organisations to enable the world’s remotest people to access the essentials they need to survive. Every six minutes, an MAF plane takes off or lands in 26 developing countries, flying help, hope and healing to some of the remotest places on earth.

[www.maf-uk.org](http://www.maf-uk.org)

## MAF Suriname

MAF lunched an air service into Suriname in 1962 to offer healthcare missions into the country’s interior from neighbouring Guyana. In 1964, MAF launched an operation from an airfield at Zorg en Hoop. After independence from the Netherlands in 1975, MAF was established as a fully Surinamese company in 1982.

In 2021, MAF Suriname flew to 25 remote locations, transporting 2,140 passengers and 139,154kg of relief cargo. 79 out of the 990 flights during 2021 were emergency medical evacuations for those without access to lifesaving healthcare.

## Media Enquiries

**Interviews can be arranged with Helmer Maas or a MAF spokesperson, either by Zoom or email.**

For more information, or to arrange an interview, please contact the MAF Media team on 07753334924, or email [newsdesk@maf-uk.org](mailto:newsdesk@maf-uk.org).