

# MINOR EMERGENCY



International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies  
Fédération internationale des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge  
Federación Internacional de Sociedades de la Cruz Roja y de la Media Luna Roja  
الاتحاد الدولي لجمعيات الصليب الأحمر والهلال الأحمر

## COLOMBIA AND NICARAGUA: HURRICANE BETA

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The Federation's mission is to improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity. It is the world's largest humanitarian organization and its millions of volunteers are active in over 181 countries.

### In Brief

**CHF 150,000 (USD 116,367 OR EUR 97,075) HAS BEEN ALLOCATED FROM THE FEDERATION'S DISASTER RELIEF EMERGENCY FUND (DREF) TO RESPOND TO THIS OPERATION.**

**UNEARMARKED FUNDS TO REPAY DREF ARE ENCOURAGED.**

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For longer-term programmes in this or other countries or regions, please refer to the Federation's Annual Appeal. For support to or for further information concerning Federation programmes or operations in this or other countries, or for national society profiles, please also access the Federation's website at <http://www.ifrc.org>

### The situation

Beta, the 13<sup>th</sup> hurricane and 23<sup>rd</sup> named storm of the Atlantic hurricane season, strengthened to a category 1 storm on Saturday, 29 October, causing damages to the Colombian islands of Providencia and San Andres as it moved towards the eastern coast of Nicaragua. The hurricane made landfall in Nicaragua on Sunday as a category two storm, bringing heavy rains and winds of 175 km/h (110 mph) which ripped the roofs from houses and uprooted trees. Thus far, no deaths have been reported, although Nicaraguan officials said a boat with 10 people aboard was missing from the remote coastal town of Puerto Cabezas. In addition, at least 30 people were injured on

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Providencia, which is located about 125 miles off the Nicaraguan coast. By today, Monday, 31 October, the hurricane had dissipated to a tropical depression, but was still expected to bring large amounts of rain to Nicaragua and could cause flash floods and mudslides.

Nicaraguan army units had rushed thousands of people into makeshift shelters in Puerto Cabezas, in north-eastern Nicaragua, where the storm was expected to come ashore. However, the storm made an unexpected turn south, hitting the central coast of the country instead. According to Nicaraguan officials, 120 homes in the village of Karawala, near where the storm came ashore, were destroyed when a nearby river broke its banks. There are also reports that 700 people in the town of Tasbapauni were trapped by the floods.



A family from Miskito leave a temporary shelter in Puerto Cabezas about 540 Km (338 miles) northeast of the capital Managua.  
*Photo courtesy of REUTERS*

The flooding also extended to neighbouring Honduras, where some 8,000 people were evacuated from 50 communities north of the Nicaraguan border after four rivers overflowed their banks. Strong winds knocked down signs, fences, trees and electricity and telephone poles, cutting off power and communication in hundreds of communities and at least two highways were blocked. Flooding also damaged rice, corn and bean fields. The Honduran government set up shelters at schools and state buildings, and flew in food, water and blankets.

### Red Cross and Red Crescent action

In response to the damages caused by Hurricane Beta on the Colombian islands of Providencia and San Andres, the Colombian Red Cross Society (CRCS) activated its hurricane contingency plan. The CRCS has been coordinating with the National Disaster Response and Preparedness System (SNPAD), including attending meetings with the National Operations Committee, and is participating in the local and national mobilization of resources.

The San Andres branch of the CRCS was placed on alert when the SNPAD first issued a warning for the storm and has been coordinating with local and regional authorities and with the armed forces to keep the public informed of developments and to prepare emergency shelters in the area. On 28 October, an inter-institutional team from the SNPAD, which included a national relief delegate from the CRCS, was sent to San Andres to support the preparedness and response activities on the islands. The CRCS HF telecommunications system on the island of Providencia was activated and telecommunications equipment was moved from the San Andres branch of the Red Cross to Providencia.

The CRCS is now providing support to volunteers on Providencia and San Andres to carry out evacuations and to store and distribute relief goods to affected persons. Seven volunteers from the San Andres branch were sent to Providencia to carry out a damage and needs assessment and support the distribution of relief goods. Another five volunteers from the Bolivar branch of the CRCS specialized in pre-hospital care, logistics and relief were sent to Providencia.

In coordination with SNPAD, the CRCS will provide the following food and non-food items to those affected by the hurricane:

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- 300 food packages
- 300 kitchen kits
- 200 mattresses
- 300 family hygiene kits
- 150 hammocks
- Plastic sheeting
- 24 tonnes of construction materials and tools

Another two tonnes of food have been sent from the Meta and Tolima branches of the CRCS to the National Society's warehouse in Bogotá and are ready to be sent to the affected area, should the need arise. This food was collected through a public campaign carried out jointly with the Colombian Red Cross Society and a local television channel.

***Nicaragua***

The Nicaraguan Red Cross is attending emergency meetings with the National System for Disaster Prevention, Mitigation and Response (SINAPRED), as well as meetings with local officials in Managua to assess the developing situation in the capital city. Red Cross teams from the Bluefield and Puerto Cabezas branches have been deployed to the affected areas to carry out damage and needs assessments. The Federation's Pan American Disaster Response Unit (PADRU) is also coordinating with SINAPRED and UN agencies to arrange an aerial assessment of the eastern coast of the country. In Ocotol, five shelters were opened to receive evacuees from nearby communities, while another four were opened in Rio Blanco. In Bluefields, a total of 35 relief workers were placed on alert and are working to inform local communities of possible evacuations. Two disaster management experts from PADRU have been deployed to Nicaragua to support the National Society's relief activities.

Further information is awaited from both the Colombian Red Cross Society and the Nicaraguan Red Cross as preliminary damage and needs assessments are carried out. Once the impact of Hurricane Beta has been evaluated, together with numbers of people affected, plans of action for relief assistance will be finalized by the National Societies.

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