

Information bulletin



International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

Cuba: Hurricane Paloma

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On 8 November 2008 hurricane Paloma lashed the Cuban central-eastern area as a category three hurricane in the Saffir-Simpson Scale. The most affected areas are Santa Cruz del Sur, Najasa and Guaimaro in the province of Camaguey and Amancio Rodriguez in Las Tunas Province.

The Cuban Red Cross (CRC) has been working arduously towards completing the objectives included in the appeal due to Gustav and Ike. However, for this new emergency, the CRC with the support of the Federation has determined that external assistance is not required at this moment.

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Flooded crops in Santa Cruz del Sur in the province of Camaguey. Source: www.adelante.cu

The Situation

Hurricane Paloma hit the island of Cuba while still recovering from the vast damages caused by hurricanes Gustav and Ike and tropical storms Fay and Hanna. The losses caused by this hurricane add to the USD 8.6 billion in total losses left by hurricanes Gustav and Ike, as reported in the Granma newspaper on 8 November.

Before the hurricane's arrival, Cuba's Civil Defence declared a hurricane alert for the central and eastern provinces of Camagüey, Las Tunas, Holguín, Granma, Santiago de Cuba, Guantánamo and the southern municipalities of Ciego de Ávila. Thanks to the preventive measures taken by the Cuban authorities livestock and other livelihoods were protected.

Coincidentally, 72 years ago on the same date the coastal town of Santa Cruz del Sur, on the southern coast of Camagüey province, was hit by a category five hurricane which left a death toll of over 3,000 people. Hurricane Paloma entered the Cuban territory through the village of Santa Cruz del Sur with wind gusts of 215 km. per hour and huge waves that travelled 1.5 km inland.

In less than 48 hours, the Civil Defense evacuated more than 1.2 million people. According to the Granma newspaper, 18 percent of the people evacuated (approximately 220,000 people) stayed in 1,448 shelters while the rest sought refuge with friends and family. More than 72 soup kitchens and 927 food processing centers were opened.

No human lives were lost. Preliminary reports indicate approximately 328 hectares of various types of crops, which were in the recovery phase from Hurricane Ike, were lost. There were disruptions in the sugar and fishing industry. The housing sector also sustained losses, with over 8,000 houses damaged in the municipality of Santa Cruz. The road infrastructure was damaged as well in the provinces of Camaguey and Las Tunas. In Las Tunas preliminary reports indicate at least 670 houses were affected, of which 141 in the community of Guayabal are destroyed.



In the province of Santiago de Cuba due to the flooding of the Contramaestre and Mogote rivers, some 7,000 farmers and four schools were completely isolated. Additionally, the high water level of the Avispero river also isolated some 4,700 villagers of La Plata, La Magdalena and Ocuja del Turquino.

Local authorities along with humanitarian agencies in the field are currently carrying out preliminary damage and need assessments.

The sea penetrated 1.5 km inland in Santa Cruz del Sur in the province of Camaguey. Source: www.adelante.cu

Red Cross and Red Crescent action

Since the beginning of the emergency, the Cuban Red Cross (CRC) mobilized approximately 6,200 volunteers. Volunteers performed evacuation, search and rescue activities, gathered information and provided sanitary and psychosocial support. After the hurricane passed, the CRC deployed 34 relief groups to the most affected areas. 27 relief groups were sent to the province of Camaguey with a total of 724 volunteers supporting relief activities in the town of Santa Cruz del Sur.

In the province of Las Tunas, the Cuban Red Cross has 18 CRC relief groups with a total of 105 volunteers. The volunteers have started to coordinate the management of the temporary shelters and the cleaning and sanitary phase, as well as the activation of the family links.

A Federation communication manager was deployed to Cuba to assist the CRC in the gathering of information and to increase the visibility of the emergency. Currently, the Cuban Red Cross and the Cuban authorities are performing damage and need assessments in the affected areas of the island.

The International Federation, through the Pan American Disaster Response Unit (PADRU) and the Regional Representation for Cuba, Dominican Republic and Haiti, have been in close contact with the CRC and are on standby to provide support if needed.

How we work

All International Federation assistance seeks to adhere to the [Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations \(NGO's\) in Disaster Relief](#) and is committed to the [Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response \(Sphere\)](#) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable.

The International Federation's activities are aligned with its Global Agenda, which sets out four broad goals to meet the Federation's mission to "improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity".

Global Agenda Goals:

- Reduce the numbers of deaths, injuries and impact from disasters.
- Reduce the number of deaths, illnesses and impact from diseases and public health emergencies.
- Increase local community, civil society and Red Cross Red Crescent capacity to address the most urgent situations of vulnerability.
- Reduce intolerance, discrimination and social exclusion and promote respect for diversity and human dignity.

Contact information

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