

INFORMATION BULLETIN



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

CARIBBEAN, CENTRAL AMERICA AND MEXICO: HURRICANE WILMA

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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

This Bulletin (no. 01/2005) is being issued for information only, and reflects the status of the situation and information available at this time. The Federation is not seeking funding or other assistance from donors for this operation at this time.

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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

Hurricane Wilma, the 12th hurricane and 21st named storm of the Atlantic hurricane season, has strengthened to a dangerous category five storm as it moves north through the western Caribbean Sea. According to the U.S. National Hurricane Center, Hurricane Wilma is the strongest hurricane ever recorded, with winds near 280 km/h (175 mph). Hurricane force winds extend outward up to 85 km (50 miles) from the centre of the storm, and tropical storm force winds extend outward up to 260 km (160 miles).

Wilma is expected to produce heavy rainfall in Cuba, the Cayman Islands, Jamaica, Honduras and Mexico. A Hurricane warning and hurricane watch have been issued for parts of Mexico's Yucatan peninsula. A hurricane watch is also in effect in Cuba for the provinces of Matanzas, La Habana and Pinar del Rio, and for the Isle of Youth. A tropical storm warning and hurricane watch have been issued for the Cayman Islands. The government of Belize has issued a tropical storm warning from the Mexican border southward to Belize City. A tropical storm warning is also in effect in Honduras. The U.S. National Hurricane Center is warning that the hurricane could affect the Florida Keys and the Florida peninsula.

Wilma has been blamed for at least 12 deaths so far. In Jamaica, one person was killed after heavy rainfall flooded several low-lying communities, blocked roads and forced 100 people into shelters, according to local officials. At least 11 people in have been killed in Haiti by floods and landslides associated with Wilma.

In the Cayman Islands, businesses and schools were closed today, Wednesday, and will likely remain closed on Thursday as the population is preparing to cope with Wilma's effects.

In Honduras, the passage of Hurricane Wilma has caused heavy rains in the department of Gracias a Dios and communication has been cut off with the community of Brus Laguna. There are also heavy rains in the departments of Atlantida and Colon, but no major damages have been reported.

In Jamaica, Hurricane Wilma continues to cause extremely heavy rainfall in already saturated territories. According the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management (ODPEM), approximately 400 people are staying in shelters in the parishes of Kingston and St. Andrew, St. Catherine and Clarendon. Several people were rescued by the Jamaica Defence Force (JDF) and the Jamaica Fire Brigade after flood waters cut off the communities of Big Pond in St. Catherine and Four Paths in Clarendon. There have also been reports of flooding in St. Elizabeth and Manchester. The National Solid Waste Management Authority has announced that garbage collections will be delayed due to the bad weather and damaged roads. Schools have been closed and assessments will be carried out on Thursday to ascertain the viability of having them reopened on Friday of this week.

In Mexico, the National Civil Protection System has ordered an evacuation of Yucatan and Quintana Roo with special emphasis on Cozumel Island. It is anticipated that areas previously affected by Hurricane Stan will again be affected by this latest hurricane. .

In Cuba, the eastern part of the island has been affected by heavy rainfall over the last several days and landslides have been reported in the province of Granma. Levees in this area are overflowing and water has to be released regularly, which is causing some localized flooding in the eastern provinces. The hurricane is expected to pass over or near the western tip of the island by Friday.

Red Cross action

The Pan American Disaster Response Unit (PADRU) in Panama is maintaining contact with the National Societies threatened by Hurricane Wilma in order to coordinate an effective response. PADRU has several disaster management delegates working in the field already as part of the response to Hurricane Stan, which hit Central America last week.

Cayman Islands

An assessment of the disaster response capacities of the Cayman Islands Overseas Branch of the British Red Cross has been prepared. The Cayman Islands Overseas Branch is on standby to open the hurricane shelter in the event that low-lying areas are flooded.

Cuba

The Cuban Red Cross (CRC) has issued an alert for the western part of the country. There are already 477 CRC volunteers working to evacuate 7,000 people from areas threatened by the hurricane.

Haiti

The Pan American Disaster Response Unit is maintaining close communication with the Federation delegation in Port-au-Prince regarding the current rains in order to monitor developments and take any necessary action.

Honduras

The Honduran Red Cross has activated its branches in the Atlantic region, and is maintaining contact with municipal, departmental and national authorities to ensure good coordination. In the north of the country, National Intervention Team members have been activated to respond should the need arise. In addition, it is expected that in the coming days an agreement will be signed with the World Food Programme to provide food rations during times of emergency with the support of volunteer personnel.

Jamaica

The Jamaica Red Cross has been providing relief items including blankets, water and hygiene kits to people in shelters, in addition to managing several of these shelters. The JRC has also assisted in the evacuation of several families to shelters. All JRC branches were on alert throughout the weekend and National Intervention Team and Community Disaster Response Teams were activated. The Jamaica Red Cross continues to work closely with the National Office for Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management and other agencies to provide assistance to people affected by flooding. The main needs at this time are for food, mattresses and bedding.

Mexico

The Deputy Coordinator for Domestic Emergencies of the Mexican Red Cross is currently working in PADRU, which is facilitating coordination between the Mexican Red Cross and PADRU as they monitor the developing situation. MRC National Intervention Teams have been placed on high alert and are ready to be deployed, as needed.

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