

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

21 October 2005

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. 03/2005) is being issued based on the needs described below. A DREF allocation of CHF 220,000 has been released. Based on further updates on the effects of Hurricane Wilma and details from preliminary assessment reports, the Federation will consider international support through an Appeal. Unearmarked funds to repay DREF are needed.

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

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, began battering Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula on Friday, 21 October with winds up to 225 km/h (140 mph). At 1pm CDT, the centre of the category four storm was located about 25 km (15 miles) east-southeast of Cozumel. Hurricane force winds extend outward up to 140 km (85 miles) from the centre of the storm, and tropical storm force winds extend outward up to 325 km (200 miles). Wilma has large circulation and hurricane conditions are already being experienced in portions of the northeastern Yucatan Peninsula.

A hurricane warning remains in effect from San Felipe to Chetumal on the Yucatan Peninsula, including Cozumel and nearby islands. A hurricane warning is also in effect for Swan Island, off the coast of Honduras. A tropical storm warning and hurricane watch is in effect from west of San Felipe to Celestun. In Cuba, a tropical storm warning is in effect for the provinces of La Habana and Pinar del Rio and for the Isle of Youth, as well as for the city of Havana, and a hurricane watch is in effect for the provinces of Matanzas, La Habana and Pinar del Rio, and for the Isle of Youth. The U.S. National Hurricane Center is also warning that the hurricane could affect the Florida Keys and the Florida peninsula.

Hurricane Wilma is expected to cause coastal storm surge flooding of 7-11 feet above normal tide levels where the



Palm trees buckle under heavy rain and strong winds as Hurricane Wilma approaches the resort town of Cancun in Mexico's state of Quintana Roo.
Photo courtesy of REUTERS

storm makes landfall on the Yucatan Peninsula, and could produce 10 to 20 inches of rain across the Yucatan Peninsula and western Cuba. Isolated amounts of rainfall up to 40 inches are possible in some areas, particularly over higher terrain in western Cuba.

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. There are reports that at least 11 people in Haiti have been killed in floods and landslides associated with Wilma.

In Belize, the National Emergency Management Organization (NEMO) has declared a green phase of the Belize Hurricane Plan for the entire country. Residents on Caye Caulker, Ambergris Caye and along the coast of the Corozal District were advised to seek shelter. Reports from San Pedro, a coastal town on Ambergris Caye state that waves are of 9 to 15 feet beyond the barrier reef and 6 to 9 feet on shore. Several wooden commercial docks have been destroyed and there is significant beach and reef erosion. In the northern districts on the mainland, the two main rivers were rising but had not yet broken their banks. Some villages on the western borders with Mexico are on flood alert.

Hurricane Wilma has now moved away from the Cayman Islands, and no major damages have been reported. However, the country is continuing to experience high waves that have caused the closure of several roads in coastal areas and a severe weather advisory remains in effect.

In Cuba, the Government of Cuba has issued alerts in the provinces of La Habana, Pinar del Rio and Matanzas, as well as for the City of Havana and for the Isle of Youth. Authorities are also monitoring the situation in the provinces of Cienfuegos, Villa Clara and Sancti Spíritus. Provincial authorities are carrying out measures for the protection of the population and livelihoods, including the evacuation of families living along coastal areas and

those prone to inundation, and the reinforcement of the roofs of houses. Authorities are also working to protect technical equipment, protect thousands of sacks of tobacco stored in the province of Pinar del Rio and drain reservoirs to reduce the threat of flooding. To date, 300,000 people have been evacuated. Although most of the people are staying with family members, 15,306 people are in emergency shelters. According to preliminary damage reports, in the province of Guantanamo, 501 houses have been damaged and 20 km of roads and two bridges have been cut off due to a landslide. In the province of Santiago de Cuba, 255 houses have been affected and 4 areas have been cut off by the flooding of two rivers.

In Haiti access to the affected areas is challenging as the South, Southeast, Northeast, Northwest and Artibonite provinces were already affected by rains from Hurricane Stan last week. The emergency situation is being managed at local level, with support from MINUSTAH and United Nations Volunteers. The Humanitarian Section of MINUSTAH and UNDP are continuously monitoring the situation. The latest reports from Haiti are that the situation in the country is now stabilizing.

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. Minor damages were registered in the municipality of Omoa, where people had to flee their houses due to flooding of up to half a meter. Some roofs of houses were partially damaged and fishing boats were destroyed. There are also heavy rains in the departments of Atlantida and Colon, but no major damages have been reported. According to the Permanent Commission for Contingencies (COPECO) precautionary evacuations have been conducted in the eastern departments of Gracias a Dios and Colon. Some 700 people were evacuated from Colon. Some flooding is also being report in the towns of Tocoa and Mosquitia on the Nicaraguan border. All alerts in the country have now been suspended.

As Hurricane Wilma moves away from Jamaica, the weather has slowly improved. The shelter occupancy has decreased to 220 persons. This number is expected to decrease throughout the next 48 hours pending the sustained improvement of weather conditions. The most affected parishes are still St. Catherine, Clarendon and Kingston and St. Andrew. Cave Valley and Pedro River in St Ann have also experienced extensive flooding where the water, though presently receding, had risen to 6-8 feet. Several main roads remain compromised or inaccessible, including the Bog Walk Gorge, while portions of Mandela Highway remain flooded. The National Office for Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management (ODPEM) is also advising that relief assistance will continue today with the distribution of food and emergency supplies to isolated and affected areas.

In Mexico, the General Coordination of Civil Protection declared a state of emergency in 18 municipalities in the state of Yucatan and 5 municipalities in the state of Quintana Roo. With this measure, the Revolving Fund of the Natural Disasters Fund (FONDEN) was activated for the immediate relief of the affected population in both states. There are reports that half of the island of Cozumel is currently under water and the town of Cancun is at high risk. Extremely heavy rainfall is falling over the area, and tree and power lines have been downed. Cancun's airport was shut down on Friday and tens of thousands of tourists not able to leave have been evacuated from hotels along the coast to shelters. Police in Cancun are enforcing an order banning the public from leaving their homes. As the eye of the storm is extremely large and moving very slowly, there is expected to be a six to seven hour calm as the eye passes over the region, prompting concerns that people will be tempted to leave the safety of shelters. Thus far, one death has been reported in Cancun; a woman was electrocuted while trying to prepare for the arrival of the storm.

Red Cross action

The Pan American Disaster Response Unit (PADRU) 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. PADRU is in contact with the French Red Cross disaster response body in the region (PIRAC) to monitor the progress of the storm and coordinate a response. PADRU is also maintaining contact with the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in the region. On Friday, two PADRU disaster management delegates travelled to Mexico City to provide support to the Mexican Red Cross relief department in carrying out a field assessment as soon as possible.

Belize

All branches of the Belize Red Cross have been alerted and all are in operational mode. The BRC disaster management committee has been activated and a meeting was held on Thursday evening.



A Mexican Red Cross ambulance is seen as Hurricane Wilma hits Playa del Carmen in Mexico on Friday 21 October.
Photo courtesy of REUTERS

Cuba

The Cuban Red Cross has been placed on 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

A delegate from the Federation's Haiti Country Delegation has gone to Les Cayes, in the South Department, to assess the situation with the regional Red Cross branch in that department. The president of the branch has been in contact with the National Society headquarters and the Delegation in Port-au-Prince to provide updates on the developing situation. Initial reports indicate that 100 families have been affected by the floods and 300 people remain without shelter. The Haitian National Red Cross Society (HNRCS) and the Federation are still working to distribute relief items to some 700 families that were affected by Hurricane Stan earlier this

month.

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. The Honduran Red Cross has established an information and coordination centre in the Ceiba branch. In the north of the country, National Intervention Team members have been activated to respond should the need arise. The National Society has also mobilized resources to conduct a possible damage and needs assessment.

Jamaica

Jamaica Red Cross continues to distribute food, blankets and hygiene kits to families affected by Hurricane Wilma. The Disaster Mental Health Unit will be working with persons in shelters. Some distributions and interventions have been challenging due to inaccessibility of some roads and communities; however the JRC branches already had pre positioned stock and some well-functioning Area Groups aided the process. JRC maintains a presence at ODPEM and is participating in a National Response Meeting to be held today, Friday.

Mexico

Mexican Red Cross National Intervention Teams have been deployed to the Yucatan Peninsula. The Mexican Red Cross relief director is in the state of Quintana Roo, where the MRC is setting up an operations centre. The National Society has already sent 54 tonnes of food supplies to the area, including food supplies and water, which will arrive in the affected area on Saturday. As soon as the Cancun airport reopens, another 18 tonnes of supplies, including medical supplies, food and water, will be airlifted to the area.

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