

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

24 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. 04/2005) 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, battered Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula, Cuba and the state of Florida in the United States over the weekend, causing widespread destruction. The category four storm first came ashore on the Yucatan Peninsula on Friday, 21 October, bringing winds of up to 225 km/h (140 mph). The slow moving storm remained over the area for two days, killing at least six people. Hurricane Wilma has also been blamed for 11 deaths in Haiti, and one in Jamaica. The somewhat weakened storm then moved back out into the Gulf of Mexico, heading towards Florida. The storm regained strength over the warm waters of the Caribbean, lashing Cuba with its outer rain bands, before slamming into Florida as a category three storm. At 2pm EDT, the centre of hurricane was located just east of Florida and was moving out into the Atlantic Ocean.

A hurricane warning is in effect for the north-western Bahamas, including Abacos, Andros, Berry, Bimini, Eleuthera, Grand Bahama and New Providence. Several hurricane and tropical storm warning are also in effect for parts of Florida, but are expected to be discontinued by late Monday.

Reports indicate that Hurricane Wilma has virtually decimated the Mexican resort town of Cancun, destroying hotels and homes and littering the streets with debris. Cancun's airport was shut down on Friday and tens of thousands of tourists not able to leave were evacuated from hotels along the coast to shelters. Shelter conditions are reported to be deteriorating as there is no electricity and little food and water. Prior to the hurricane, Mexican officials had 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. Emergency teams are just now beginning to reach the affected areas, but access is difficult due to flooding and debris in the roads. The security situation in the area is also unstable as there have been reports of looting and rioting. Mexican security forces are in the area to restore order. Authorities have started food and water distribution at the City Hall; waiting lines were 500 to 600 meters long, with both residents and tourists waiting for food.

Although Cuba was spared a direct hit as the storm stayed north of the country on its way towards Florida, Wilma lashed the capital city of Havana on Sunday with 138 km/h (86 mph) winds, bringing heavy rains and flooding.



Massive waves crash against buildings on Havana's seafont boulevard El Malecon.
Photo courtesy of REUTERS

Flood waters of up to six feet have been reported in some parts of the city. Authorities had previously cut off electricity in the city to prevent electrical accidents, leaving the city's 2 million residents without power. Storm surges forced the evacuation of the town of Santa Fe, south of Havana. Prior to the hurricane, the government of Cuba had evacuated nearly 500,000 people from high risk areas and had 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. Although most of the people evacuated 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.

Wilma battered Florida for about six hours on Monday, causing at least three deaths and widespread flooding and damage. The storm made landfall in the early morning as a powerful category 3 hurricane. As Wilma moved

across Florida, it was downgraded to a category 2 storm. By just after noon, the storm's centre was back over the Atlantic, where it regained strength to category 3 status. Although there were fears that many people ignored the evacuation orders issued for much of southern Florida, more than 33,000 people were reportedly staying in shelters. Some 3,000 National Guardsmen have been mobilized to respond to the hurricane, and another 3,000 have been placed on alert.

Prior to hitting Mexico, rains associated with Wilma caused flooding in Belize, the Cayman Islands, Haiti, Honduras and Jamaica. The situation in these countries is now largely under control.

In addition, Tropical Storm Alpha formed in the Caribbean Sea yesterday as the 22nd named storm of the Atlantic season, breaking the record for most storms set in 1933. Alpha caused widespread flooding in Haiti and the Dominican Republic over the weekend. The centre of the storm came ashore near the town of Barahona, in the south-western Dominican Republic, near the border with Haiti. The tropical storm brought winds of about 50 mph, but weakened to a tropical depression over land. Tropical storm warnings were effect for the Haiti and the Dominican Republic, as well as for Turks and Caicos and the south-eastern Bahamas, but have now been discontinued. In Haiti, the town of Jacmel experienced significant flooding and residents were evacuated to a nearby school for shelter; however, the flood waters quickly receded after the storm had passed and most shelter residents have now been able to return to their homes. The storm has now been downgraded to a tropical depression and is moving north and is no longer a threat to land.

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 and are in the affected area to provide support to the Mexican Red Cross relief department in carrying out relief activities and field assessments. In addition, PADRU is arranging a flight carrying relief items, such as hygiene kits, kitchen sets and tarpaulins, to be sent to Mexico.

Mexico

Mexican Red Cross National Intervention Teams were deployed to the Yucatan Peninsula prior to the hurricane, and the MRC relief director was in the state of Quintana Roo to set up an operations centre. The National Society sent 54 tonnes of food supplies to the area, including food supplies and water, which arrived in the affected area on Saturday. The Mexican Red Cross is currently mobilizing all available transport units to the Yucatan peninsula. This may hamper the ongoing relief efforts in other parts of the country in response to Hurricane Stan, which hit the country earlier this month. The MRC has negotiated to have 10 Aero Mexico flights bring food items and bottled water from Mexico City, and is beginning food distributions to shelters. Local branches of the MRC have been working continuously since the onset of the emergency, providing basic first aid and health care, evacuating people to shelters and rescuing people trapped under debris. MRC relief workers also delivered several babies whose mothers were not able to reach proper medical facilities.

Cuba

The Cuban Red Cross has been placed on alert for the western part of the country. Prior to the hurricane, 477 CRC volunteers evacuated 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. In Jacmel, 50 people remain in shelter, although most of those evacuated have been able to return home as flood waters are receding. Volunteers from the South East departmental branch are assisting the

affected people in Jacmel. 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.

United States

In the United States, American Red Cross officials are communicating with federal, state, and local authorities to share information. The American Red Cross has opened 27 shelters in regions of the Southeast Service Area, and 1,833 persons were in Red Cross shelters in Florida. The National Society has mobilized 6 Emergency Response Vehicles, kitchen support trailers, shelter support trailers, bulk distribution supplies, and two emergency communications response vehicles in Florida. The ARC has also deployed 860 trained response staff and volunteers. In addition, the American Red Cross is responding to an initial request for 1,000 hygiene kits for the Mexican Red Cross. These relief supplies were being sent from the Pan American Disaster Response Unit in Panama.

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