

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:TROPICAL STORM ERNESTO

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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 183 countries.

In Brief

This Bulletin is being issued for information only, and reflects the situation and the information available at this time. The Federation is not seeking funding or other assistance from donors for this operation at this time.

The International Federation undertakes activities that are aligned with its Global Agenda, which sets out four broad goals to achieve 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.

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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 Organizations \(NGOs\) 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

Tropical storm Ernesto passed over Cuba during the day of 28 August, bringing more than 15 cm of steady rain, but no flooding or strong wind gusts as had been anticipated. As of 8AM EDT today, 29 August, Ernesto was just to the north of Cuba, moving in a north-westerly direction towards the Florida Keys, at 22 km/hour with maximum sustained winds near 75 km /hour. The storm was predicted to strengthen over the next 24 hours, and communities in both Florida and the north-western Bahamas have been put on hurricane watch.

At that time, the centre of Tropical Storm Ernesto was located at latitude 22.8 north and longitude 79.3 west, or about 320 km SE of Key West, Florida and 350 km SSE of Miami, Florida. Tropical storm winds extend outward up to 140 km from the centre. Miami International Airport is to be shut down later on 29 August, and a tropical storm watch and hurricane watch are in effect from New Smyrna Beach southward along the west coast, as well as for all of the Florida Keys.

The north-western and central Bahamas have also been put on tropical storm warning and hurricane watch, as Ernesto re-gains strength.

Reports from Cuba indicate that all of those evacuated are now returning to their homes. The most affected area has apparently been the Province of Guantanamo, where rains were heaviest. Dams in the southern provinces of Cuba are full. At 8AM EDT on 29 August, Cuba had officially discontinued all storm warnings. However, rainfall was still being reported over the eastern parts of the island during the morning of 29 August, as the tail-end of storm activity associated with Ernesto continued to move over Cuba.

Red Cross National Societies and International Federation delegates in the field also report that:

- In Haiti, two people are thought to have lost their lives due to the storm. There has been flooding in certain areas – specifically near Gonaïves and in Belle Anse - although not to the extent feared, according to present assessments. Nevertheless, most of the rivers along the southern peninsula are over-flowing and there have been preliminary reports of damage to houses, in Saint-Jean. Exact locations and numbers are still to be determined. Some infrastructure damage has also been reported, with roads said to be impassable between Les Cayes and Jérémie, a bridge down in Grand Goave, and power lines destroyed in Jacmel. The mobile phone network has been out of order in many places.
- In Jamaica, branches in the North-Eastern section continued to experience sporadic showers on 28 August, although most of Jamaica was experiencing sunshine. The Government of Jamaica, through the local communication channels (media) and its disaster agency (ODPEM), declared a stand-down for Jamaica as Ernesto moved away from the island. Monitoring of possible flooding was still on-going.
- The Cayman Islands experienced no significantly bad weather over the period, and the all clear was given on 27 August.

Attention is now focusing on the Bahamas and Florida, as tropical storm Ernesto begins its track across the Florida Straits, with landfall in Florida predicted for late on 29 August, although squalls and rain bands are likely to affect the Keys somewhat earlier in the day. The Bahamas continue to closely monitor the track of the storm.

Red Cross action

The International Federation – through its Panama Regional Delegation and its Pan American Disaster Response Unit (PADRU) based in Panama, and supported by its country Delegation in Haiti, as well as its Sub Regional Office in Trinidad – has remained in close contact with the National Societies in the Bahamas, Cuba, Haiti, Jamaica and the Overseas Branch of British Red Cross in the Cayman Islands, as well as with the American Red Cross, to coordinate actions and exchange information, as tropical storm Ernesto progressed through the region.

The Bahamas Red Cross Society is closely monitoring the track of Ernesto, so as to adjust preparations accordingly. Branches in Grand Bahama, Bimini and Andros are on hurricane watch. National Intervention (NIT) teams are on stand-by in Grand Bahama, to be complemented by NIT teams from New Providence, if required. Furthermore, the Red Cross in association with the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) has just completed training of 32 new Certified Emergency Response Team members (CERTs) – with approximately 200 in-country at present.

The American Red Cross (ARC) continues its Response and Activation preparations. Actions include:

- The deployment of two leadership teams and support staff to Florida and Alabama on 28 August;
- Building appropriate feeding capacity in anticipation of the storm in Florida, with kitchen teams with a capacity of 500,000 meals on alert;
- Pe-loaded Emergency Response Vehicles (100) being sent to Alabama, for possible deployment to Florida;
- Pre-positioned relief stock being prepared, including cots, hygiene kits and blankets;
- An emergency Communications Response Vehicle is on stand-by;
- Hurricane-prone residents are being asked to register on the Red Cross Safe & Well website.

During tropical storm Ernesto's track over the island, Cuban Red Cross volunteers coordinated with local authorities in the evacuation of persons living in high risk areas and in the management of shelters. Based on official figures, in total, 243,367 persons were evacuated in the eastern provinces of Cuba – and are now returning to their homes. In Santiago de Cuba, one of the most affected areas, 117 emergency shelters and 96 food preparation centers had been opened.

The Haitian National Red Cross Society (HNRCs) remained activated during 28 August - with its Emergency Operations Centre (CO) and NIT teams all on stand-by. First aid kits were pre-positioned in the Departments of the South and South-East. Red Cross volunteers also provided assistance to people in shelters – particularly the elderly and children. Damage and needs assessments are currently underway.

The Jamaica Red Cross Executive Committee remained on stand-by throughout 27 August and part of 28 August. The Jamaica Red Cross branches remained opened to coordinate any efforts between its local agencies and its National Headquarters. Radio contact was maintained with the Bahamas Red Cross Society and the Grenada Red Cross Society as well as with local users as part of on-going radio check exercises. Relief items were dispatched to the St. Elizabeth Branch, to increase its inventory, as a preparedness measure. Items included: rubber boots, hygiene kits, sheets sets, tarpaulins, bleach, soft drinks and clothing. Upon receiving status reports from its field co-ordinators island-wide, the National Society officially declared a stand down of the situation at 3:00 p.m. (EST) on 28 August. However some volunteers remained on stand-by in the case of any eventualities such as flooding, especially in the northern portion of the island which was still experiencing light showers.

The Cayman Islands Overseas Branch of British Red Cross was on stand-by, with volunteers activated, during 26-27 August. A meeting was held with 40 of the Disaster Management volunteers, to review disaster management response processes – with shelter wardens and first aid teams designated as first-responders, to be followed by relief and response assessment teams. Stocks and emergency response kits were checked. The all clear was subsequently declared on 27 August.

PADRU has up-dated its stock list, with a view to dispatching emergency relief items as quickly as required, and is on stand-by to deploy disaster management delegates and Regional Intervention Team (RIT) members, as needs require.

Coordination and Information

PADRU continues to coordinate with the OCHA Regional Office, based in Panama, and remains in constant contact with National Societies, as the storm progresses over the region. In addition, PADRU is in regular contact with the Federation's Operations Support Department (OSD) in Geneva, for possible activation of global response tools such as FACT and ERU, as the situation warrants.

American Red Cross staff members will be coordinating with FEMA's Emergency Response Team (ERT) assessment operations, and an ARC staff member will be positioned at the Florida Emergency Operations Centre. In the Bahamas, the Red Cross is coordinating with the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), as the situation requires.

The Federation's Disaster Management Information System (DMIS) is being up-dated on a regular basis.

A special page on both of the Regional Federation websites at www.cruzroja.org and www.caribbeanredcross.org have been created and will be up-dated on a regular basis, as the situation requires.

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