

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 : HURRICANE MICHELLE

5 November 2001

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This Information Bulletin is being issued based on the needs described below reflecting the information available at this time. Based on further updates and details from assessment reports, or should the situation deteriorate, the Federation will consider international support through a Preliminary Appeal.

The Situation

On Saturday, 3 November, Hurricane Michelle reached a category level of 4 (out of a maximum of 5) on the Saffir-Simpson scale, and was continuing on its slow north-easterly path towards the western coast of Cuba after killing eight persons and leaving thousands of persons homeless in Honduras, Nicaragua and Jamaica. The Cuban Red Cross (CRC) expected the hurricane to cause extensive damage (by comparison, the most powerful hurricane to hit Cuba occurred in 1926 and killed over 600 people, and its winds were reportedly weaker than those of Hurricane Michelle).

On Sunday, 4 November, at 11 PM local time in Cuba, the hurricane was situated over the province of Matanzas where mountains reduced the force of the winds to 200 km/h, decreasing the hurricane category 3. At 1 PM eastern standard time, Hurricane Michelle was moving off the northern coast of Cuba at 20 km/h and heading towards the Bahamas with maximum sustained winds of 175 km/h.

A hurricane watch is in effect for the north-western and central Bahamas, including Grand Bahama, the Abacos, the Berry Islands, Bimini, Andros, New Providence, Eleuthera, Cat Island, Exumas, San Salvador, Rum Cay, and Long Island. A hurricane warning is also in effect for Bermuda.

In Cuba, Hurricane Michelle delivered heavy rains to a very extensive area of the island. There is a significant danger of floods since 49 dams (out of 219 in the entire country) had already reached 92% of their capacity before the hurricane, and the ground is thoroughly saturated due to the heavy rains. The government started a controlled initiative yesterday morning (Sunday) in order to relieve some of the pressure on the dams in preparation for more rains to come. The most affected area is considered to be Matanzas and Villa Clara, with the heavy rains also affecting the province of La Havana. The torrential rains have also seriously damaged crops in Santi Espiritu and the Island of Youth, and the entire banana crop has reportedly been lost.

On Sunday, at 1:00 PM local time, the government cut the electricity and gas services as a security measure to avoid accidents. The only direct communications with the island is by satellite phone, while airports are closed and train and bus services have been cancelled.

Initial reports indicate no deaths, but some 590,000 persons have been evacuated and 102,257 people are living in public shelters. Some 6,642 tourists and 918 foreign students have been evacuated as well and placed in other hotels in safe areas. The government has guaranteed food provisions in those shelters. No news or information has been received from the Province of Villa Clara.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

All Cuban Red Cross (CRC) branches are on full alert, with 24,500 volunteers mobilized to support the civil defence with evacuation activities and to assist in managing emergency shelters. CRC volunteers are also working intensively to provide support to the population evacuated to shelters in the provinces of La Havana, the city of Havana, Santi Espiritu, Ciego de Avila, and Cienfuegos.

- In the city of **Havana**, some 36,214 people have been evacuated by local authorities, and some 14,645 of them currently assisted in 50 public shelters which have been opened. Some 568 CRC volunteers are working at the shelters assisting the local authorities.
- In the **Province of Havana** approximately 15,564 people have been evacuated by local authorities. CRC volunteers are working in 43 shelters.
- In the **Province of Santi Espiritu** some 20,923 people have been evacuated by local authorities. Some 324 volunteers are assisting in 76 shelters. This province contains the majority of the country's hydro-powerstations, and the dams are reaching their maximum capacity.
- The **Province of Ciego de Avila** there are 71 public shelters, and 427 CRC volunteers mobilized.
- In the **Province of Cienfuegos** some 44,700 people have been evacuated by local authorities. Approximately 5,877 of these people are accommodated in public shelters, with 162 CRC volunteers assisting in these locations.

Red Cross intervention groups and search and rescue brigades are actively working in close co-ordination with the Civil Defence and Firemen.

The CRC is currently assessing the needs of the people affected, with the cooperation of the Federation's Regional Delegation in Santo Domingo and the Pan-American Disaster Response Unit (PADRU). The Federation's Field Assessment and Coordination Team (FACT) system remains on alert.

Needs

The CRC is participating in a damage assessment together with government authorities and the Civil Defence, and further information will be made available shortly.

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All International Federation Operations seek to adhere to the Code of Conduct and are committed to the Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response (SPHERE Project) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable.

For support to or for further information concerning Federation operations in this or other countries, please access the Federation website at <http://www.ifrc.org>

For longer-term programmes, please refer to the Federation's Annual Appeal.

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