

CENTRAL AMERICA AND MEXICO: HURRICANE MITCH

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The Disaster

Tropical storm *Mitch*, classified as a Category 5 hurricane on 26 October, with sustained winds of 170 miles per hour lost some intensity on Wednesday and remained over the Honduran islands of La Bahía. Heavy rains and strong winds provoking severe floods are still affecting the Atlantic coasts of Honduras, Guatemala, Mexico and Belize and are forecast to continue another 72 hours. Due to its erratic movements, it is very difficult to anticipate its direction. Although the situation is more stable in Nicaragua, Panama and Costa Rica, the consequences of the storms during the past days are still affecting the population, especially along the Pacific coasts. The number of deaths in the affected areas has increased to 11, hundreds of homes are estimated to be destroyed and more than 120,000 persons have been evacuated.

HONDURAS

Today 7 persons have been reported dead while 45,330 have been evacuated. It is difficult to assess the total damage as many areas have lost communication means. It is estimated that more than 1 million persons have been affected. The hospital on the island of Roatan has been partially destroyed. Hundreds of tourists and residents have been evacuated by helicopter to temporary shelters.

Strong winds and rains are causing the overflow of all tributaries of the river Meredón affecting the areas of La Ceiba, Tela, Puerto Cortés, Progreso, Pimienta, San Manuel, and La Lima. Electricity and water supplies have been affected. Intensive rains in Tegucigalpa are causing mud slides prompting the evacuation of residents.

NICARAGUA

The northern part of the Nicaraguan Atlantic region has suffered from strong storms caused by *Mitch*. Two persons have been killed and at least 1,500 hectares of crops have been ruined in the Nicaraguan Pacific regions of Granada, Rivas, Leon and Chinandega as a result of flooding. Also, 5,000 persons in 10 communities have been left isolated due to the overflow of the river Malacatoya. Local flights have been suspended.

COSTA RICA

In Costa Rica where last week three persons died, two disappeared and more than 1000 were evacuated, the National Emergency Commission maintains a general alert. Strong rains are forecast for the province of Guanacaste (northern Pacific and border with Nicaragua) where shelters and relief items are being organised to assist persons already evacuated. The estimated number of victims has increased to 3,000. Houses have been badly damaged, crops lost and access to basic health care and safe water cut off. Communities located in the south of the area have been completely isolated for four days, and distribution of relief is being planed by foot.

GUATEMALA

In Guatemala, the eastern coast has also received the storm's first signs of alert. Strong winds, rains were reported and the government announced an emergency alert in the areas of Izabal, Alta Verapaz and Petén. Already, 5,200 persons from 12 communities in Izabal have been evacuated. The community of San Francisco has disappeared completely due to the strong waves. Its 50 families were evacuated. Local flights have been suspended as the situation is expected to worsen during the next 72 hours.

MEXICO

Authorities report severe rains in Quintana Roo, Yucatan and Campeche and the population remains on alert. The uncertain direction of the hurricane threatens stability in the area. Some 20,000 persons have already been evacuated to 1,060 temporary shelters. Also, in the tourist resorts of Cancun and Islas Mujeres, an estimated 25,400 tourists have been evacuated from the area.

PANAMA

Since Thursday 22 October, Panama has been suffering from heavy rains which caused flooding in the provinces of Darién, Veraguas and Chiriqui, leaving more than 15,000 people affected.

BELIZE

The coasts of Belize are being affected by the torrential rains. A country-wide alert has been issued and approximately 51,000 persons have been evacuated. About 31,000 people are accommodated in temporary shelters while others have found refuge with family or friends. Since yesterday the situation in the temporary shelters has worsened due to the lack of sufficient food.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

COSTA RICA

The 18 local branches in the region of Guanacaste are participating in all the evacuation and rescue activities in co-ordination with the local Emergency Committees. More than 350 Red Cross volunteers are busy in the area while others are preparing a needs assessment to determine the course of action for the next few days.

HONDURAS

The Honduran Red Cross has established a national information centre in the city of Tegucigalpa maintaining permanent contact with the areas in danger and those which are isolated, such as the Honduran Mosquitia. In the region of Cortés, 16 temporary centres have been set up to shelter approximately 425 families that had to be evacuated. A relief team from the Honduran RC is now on its way from the operations centre in San Pedro de Sula with blankets, clothes, shoes, plastic sheeting, hygiene kits and kitchen tools to respond to the most urgent needs of the evacuees. An evaluation of needs is also underway.

NICARAGUA

An in-depth assessment of needs has been prepared concluding that a food relief operation is needed in the affected areas. A request has been forwarded to the International Federation by the National Society seeking support to assist 2,500 families.

GUATEMALA

In Guatemala, the Red Cross branches in Puerto Barrios and Chinook are assisting with the evacuation efforts and distribution of relief items in the shelters, where medicines are now also needed.

MEXICO

The Mexican Red Cross is assisting the government in evacuation of the affected population and forewarning those in areas that could be badly hit, such as the Yucatán Peninsula.

PANAMA

The Red Cross Society of Panama has mobilised a rescue team to the affected areas, focusing on the province of Darién. The local branches in Puerto Armuelles and Veraguas are supporting the action and distributing food, water, clothes and medicines.

BELIZE

The Belize Red Cross is in permanent contact with the National Emergency Management Organisation (NEMO) and has mobilised volunteers to assist in the management of the temporary shelters. The Red Cross clinic in Belmopan has opened to provide first aid and primary care. The Red Cross anticipates the need for food, clothing, and medicines, as well as assistance in preparing damage and needs assessments.

Needs

A preliminary Appeal will probably be launched in the next few days.

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