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Information bulletin

Central America: Hurricane Otto

 International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

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Date of disaster: 16 November 2016	Point of contact: Felipe Del Cid, disaster management coordinator for Central America, email: felipe.delcid@ifrc.org
Host National Societies: Costa Rican Red Cross (CRRC), Nicaraguan Red Cross (NRC) and Red Cross Society of Panama (RCSP)	
Number of people affected: Costa Rica: 5,915 people; Panama: 12,000 people.	
Red Cross Red Crescent Partners currently involved in the operation: American Red Cross, Canadian Red Cross Society, Italian Red Cross, Spanish Red Cross, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), International Committee of the Red Cross.	
N° of other partner organizations involved in the operation: Costa Rican National Emergency Commission, National Civil Protection System of Panama, National System for Disaster Prevention, Mitigation and Response (SINAPRED) of Nicaragua.	

This bulletin is being issued for information only and reflects the current situation and details available at this time.

The situation

As per the United States' National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), a tropical depression formed over the Caribbean coast of Central America has been upgraded to a Category 1 hurricane. Severe rainfall and strong winds are affecting Panama, Costa Rica and Nicaragua.

Costa Rica:

The National Emergency Commission (Comisión Nacional de Emergencia, CNE) raised the state of alert to yellow due to the strengthening of the low pressure system in the

Caribbean Ocean and the increase in rainfall along the Caribbean coast of the country. The yellow alert is effective at national level. Furthermore, the Ministry of Public Works reports a landslide near the bridge in the La

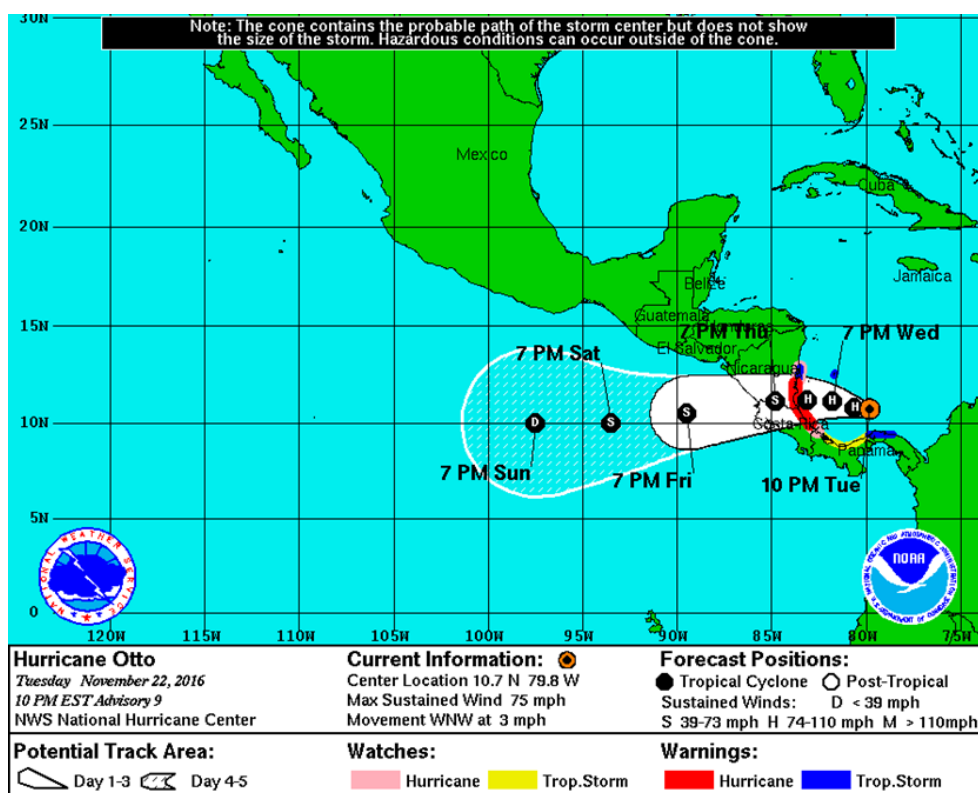


Figure 1: Coastal Watches/Warnings and 5-Day Forecast Cone for Storm Center. Source: National Hurricane Center, NOAA.

Vieja River (route between Ciudad Quesada and Zarcerro). Authorities are mobilizing machinery to the area this following Monday to open access on this road. Further roadblocks are reported in the routes between Vara Blanca and Cariblanco, route 32, roads in the Turrialba canton, route to Carate de Jimenez in the southern area of the country.

The CNE stated that as of 21 November, at least 370 people affected by flooding are staying in collective centres. Floods have affected 99 communities and 21 routes.

Nicaragua: The Government of Nicaragua declared a Red alert due to high probabilities of Hurricane Otto affecting the population in the southern areas of Caribe Sur, Chontales, Zelaya Central and Río San Juan. All government institutions have activated their response systems. The government carry out a press conference and requested the private sector to enable volunteers to support during the preparedness and response efforts. In addition, in preparation for the potential impact of the hurricane, authorities have deployed national staff to the area of Bluefields and repositioned relief items.

Panama: The low pressure system remained stationary on the Caribbean coasts of Panama and Costa Rica since 16 November generating heavy and moderate rainfall affecting the provinces in the Central area, Veraguas, Chiriquí, Colón and Bocas del Toro. On 17 November, the National Civil Protection System (SINAPROC) declared a Green Alert level. However, due to the intense rainfall and flooding, the alert has been raised to Red specifically for the Chiriquí, Bocas Del Toro, Veraguas, Comarca Ngabe Bugle and Colón provinces; and yellow to the rest of the country. SINAPROC activated the Joint Task Force, the National Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) and provincial-level EOCs in Chiriquí, Colon and Bocas del Toro.

Following these alerts, the Ministry of Health also declared a Green Alert for the health centres to ensure the provision of medical assistance to the affected population. Firefighters are monitoring the situation in San Miguelito, La Chorrera, northern area of the Panama province and Arraijan to evacuate at risk families in these areas. Flooding and landslides have also been reported in the province of Panama and Chorrera.

As of 22 November, 19 collective centres across the country have been opened by the government. Public offices have been closed in Bocas del Toro and classes have been suspended at national level. Thus far, three deaths are reported.

The water purification plant of San Bartolo of the Baru district (Chiriquí province) has been affected, interrupting the access to safe water to approximately 12,000 people. Two collective centres are currently open, one in Baru housing 93 persons and another one in Chiriquí Viejo with 271 affected people.

Red Cross and Red Crescent action

Costa Rican Red Cross: The National Society declared an Institutional Yellow Alert through the activation of its National Relief and Operations Plan. CRRC staff and volunteers are monitoring of at-risk and affected areas and conducting search and rescue activities. In support to local authorities, the National Society is supporting also evacuation efforts and verifying incidents reported through the national emergency service (911). Preliminary reports from the CRRC identify 5,915 people affected thus far.

Nicaraguan Red Cross: The National Society activated its National Emergency Operations Centre and alerted all branches located in the trajectory path of Hurricane Otto. The Nicaraguan Red Cross's national risk management team is active and carrying out preparedness actions which include taking stock of current available resources:

- 250 volunteers are available in the potential areas to be affected;
- 4 trucks are available for distribution of relief items if required;
- non-food items stock available include kitchen kits, blankets and jerry cans;
- 200 chainsaws, 150 water filters, and other materials (e.g. shovels, wheelbarrows) provided by USAID are also available;
- key messages have been developed to be disseminated through the NRC's social media accounts.

The National Society issued a DMIS report. Furthermore, the Spanish Red Cross has made available other three trucks and additional support to the preparedness response efforts of the National Society.

Red Cross Society of Panama: RCSP is supporting local authorities with evacuations efforts in Baru (Chiriquí province) continue to monitoring flood-prone areas. A DMIS report has been issued. Furthermore, in order to support the affected population, the National Society opened its collection centre to receive in-kind donations from the general public and will activate AMMADO to receive online donations as well. The National Society is preparing a DREF request for preparedness and response actions.

Red Cross and Red Crescent actors:

The IFRC shared two information alert messages on 15 November. The Regional Contingency Plan for hurricanes has been activated. The IFRC's regional office for the Americas through its Disaster and Management department has activated the regional Emergency Operations Centre and the current level of alert is orange. Furthermore, the IFRC maintains regular communication with the National Societies of Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Panama through its disaster manager coordinator and Country Cluster officer. The disaster manager coordinator for Central America has been pre-emptively mobilized to Nicaragua. In order to support information management needs, a dashboard reflecting information on Hurricane Otto is available through the following link: <https://app.klipfolio.com/published/f4e8cfb088931f8e116e42a45be0b66a/dcu-op2>

The American Red Cross regional representative is currently in Costa Rica providing support to the National Society and staff in Panama is also providing support to the Red Cross Society of Panama. The Canadian Red Cross Society and Spanish Red Cross are also present in Nicaragua ready to support the NRC.

Contact information

For further information specifically related to this operation please contact:

- **IFRC Country Cluster Office for Costa Rica, Honduras and Nicaragua:** Nelson Aly Rodríguez; email: nelson.alyrodriguez@ifrc.org
- **IFRC Regional Office of Americas, in Panama** (+ 507 317 3050)
 - Omar Robinson, Emergency Response Coordinator – Disaster and Crisis Department; email: omar.robinson@ifrc.org
 - Roxana Trigo, senior liaison officer; email: roxana.trigo@ifrc.org
 - Diana Medina; communications manager; email: diana.medina@ifrc.org
 - Priscila Gonzalez, planning, monitoring and reporting team coordinator; email: priscila.gonzalez@ifrc.org
- **In Geneva:** Cristina Estrada, emergency and recovery lead; email: cristina.estrada@ifrc.org
- **Regional Logistics Unit (RLU):** Stephany Murillo; senior regional logistics officer; email: stephany.murillo@ifrc.org

For Resource Mobilization and Pledges:

- Paula Ameijeiras; senior partnerships and resource development officer; email: paula.ameijeiras@ifrc.org



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All IFRC assistance seeks to adhere to the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's) in Disaster Relief and the

Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response (Sphere) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable.

The IFRC's vision is to inspire, encourage, facilitate and promote at all times all forms of humanitarian activities by National Societies, with a view to preventing and alleviating human suffering, and thereby contributing to the maintenance and promotion of human dignity and peace in the world.

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1. Save lives, protect livelihoods, and strengthen recovery from disaster and crises.
2. Enable healthy and safe living.
3. Promote social inclusion and a culture of non-violence and peace.