

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

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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 181 countries.

In Brief

This Bulletin (no. 02/2005) is being issued for information only, and reflects the status of the situation and information available at this time. The Federation is not seeking funding or other assistance from donors for this operation at this time.

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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, has weakened slightly to a category four storm as it continues to move northwest through the western Caribbean Sea towards the Yucatan Peninsula. According to the U.S. National Hurricane Center, some re-strengthening is forecast during the next 24 hours. On Thursday afternoon, 20 October, the centre of Hurricane Wilma was located approximately 255 km (160 miles) south-southeast of Cozumel, Mexico, and the centre of the hurricane was expected to be over the Yucatan Peninsula by Friday morning. Hurricane Wilma currently has maximum sustained winds near 230 km/h (145 mph). Hurricane force winds extend outward up to 150 km (90 miles) from the centre of the storm, and tropical storm force winds extend outward up to 415 km (260 miles).

A hurricane warning remains in effect from San Felipe to Chetumal on the Yucatan Peninsula, including Cozumel and nearby islands. A hurricane warning is also in effect for Swan Island, off the coast of Honduras. A tropical storm warning and hurricane watch is in effect from west of San Felipe to Celestun. A tropical storm warning is in effect for Belize from the border with Mexico southward to Belize City. In Cuba, a tropical storm warning is in effect for the provinces of La Habana and Pinar del Rio and for the Isle of Youth, as well as for the city of Havana, and a hurricane watch is in effect for the provinces of Matanzas, La Habana and Pinar del Rio, and for the Isle of Youth. In addition, a tropical storm warning remains in effect for Honduras, from the border with Nicaragua to Cabo Camaron. The U.S. National Hurricane Center is also warning that the hurricane could affect the Florida Keys and the Florida peninsula.

Hurricane Wilma is expected to cause coastal storm surge flooding of 7-10 feet above normal tide levels where the storm makes landfall on the Yucatan Peninsula, and could produce 10 to 20 inches of rain across the Yucatan Peninsula and western Cuba. Isolated amounts of rainfall up to 40 inches are possible in some areas, particularly over higher terrain in western Cuba. The storm is also expected to cause between 2 and 4 inches of rainfall across the Cayman Islands, Swan Island and portions of Honduras.

Wilma has been blamed for at least 12 deaths so far. In Jamaica, one person was killed after heavy rainfall flooded several low-lying communities, blocked roads and forced 100 people into shelters, according to local officials. There are reports that at least 11 people in have been killed in Haiti by floods and landslides associated with Wilma.

In Belize, the National Emergency Management Organization (NEMO) has declared a Preliminary Phase of the Belize Hurricane Plan as a precautionary measure. Residents on Caye Caulker, Ambergris Caye and along the coast of the Corozal District have been advised to seek adequate shelter. The population living in the outer atolls and islands beyond the barrier reef has been advised to immediately seek safe harbour as rough seas and high waves are already beginning to affect the country.

Hurricane Wilma has now moved away from the Cayman Islands, and no major damages have been reported. However, the country is continuing to experience high waves that have caused the closure of several roads in coastal areas and a severe weather advisory remains in effect. Businesses and school remained closed on Thursday as the population is preparing to cope with Wilma's effects.

In Cuba, the Government of Cuba has 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. Authorities are also monitoring the situation in the provinces of Cienfuegos, Villa Clara and Sancti Spíritus. Provincial authorities are carrying out measures for the protection of the population and livelihoods, including the evacuation of families living along coastal areas and those prone to inundation, and the reinforcement of the roofs of houses. Authorities are also working to protect technical equipment, protect thousands of sacks of tobacco stored in the province of Pinar del Rio and drain reservoirs to reduce the threat of flooding. Tourists are being evacuated from facilities in the west, and 5,296 persons have been evacuated from provinces in Guantanamo, Granama and Santiago de Cuba.

In Haiti, several regions of the country have been affected by the heavy rains associated with Hurricane Wilma. At least 11 deaths have been confirmed in the south of the country, 7 in the South Department. Access to the affected areas is challenging as the South, Southeast, Northeast, Northwest and Artibonite provinces were already affected by rains from Hurricane Stan last week. The emergency situation is being managed at local level, with support

from MINUSTAH and United Nations Volunteers. The Humanitarian Section of MINUSTAH and UNDP are continuously monitoring the situation.

In Honduras, the passage of Hurricane Wilma has caused heavy rains in the department of Gracias a Dios and communication has been cut off with the community of Brus Laguna. There are also heavy rains in the departments of Atlantida and Colon, but no major damages have been reported. According to the Permanent Commission for Contingencies (COPECO) precautionary evacuations have been conducted in the eastern departments of Gracias a Dios and Colon. Thus far, 700 people have been evacuated from Colon. Some flooding is also being report in the towns of Tocoa and Mosquitia on the Nicaraguan border. The country will remain on alert until Saturday.

In Jamaica, severe weather associated with Hurricane Wilma has been affecting Jamaica since 16 October. The Office of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management (ODPEM) is reporting that eastern St. Thomas parish is currently inaccessible by road due to floods. Landslides have also been reported in St. Catherine, Trelawny and Kingston and St. Andrew parishes. In Moneague, the Jamaica Defence Force as well as the Parish Disaster Committee are engaged in both evacuation and rescue efforts. Distribution of food and non-food items by the Red Cross continues, primarily of persons still in shelters since the passage of Hurricane Dennis in July 2005

In Mexico, a red Alert has been established for the state of Quintana Roo, and the National Civil Protection System ordered the evacuation of Yucatan and Quintana Roo, with special emphasis on Cozumel Island. Some 74,000 tourists are being evacuated out of Cancun, the Mayan Riviera, Isla Mujeres and Cozumel. Fishing villages in the area have also been evacuated.

Red Cross and Red Crescent 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.

Belize

All branches of the Belize Red Cross have been alerted and all are in operational mode. The BRC disaster management committee has been activated and a meeting was scheduled to be held on Thursday evening.

Cayman Islands

An assessment of the disaster response capacities of the Cayman Islands Overseas Branch of the British Red Cross has been prepared. The Cayman Islands Overseas Branch remains on standby to open its hurricane shelter in the event that low-lying areas are flooded.

Cuba

The Cuban Red Cross has been placed on alert for the western part of the country. There are already 477 CRC volunteers working to evacuate 7,000 people from areas threatened by the hurricane.

Haiti

A delegate from the Federation's Haiti Country Office 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 country 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. The Haitian National Red Cross Society and the Federation are still working to distribute relief items to the some 2,000 families that were affected by Hurricane Stan earlier this month.

Honduras

The Honduran Red Cross has activated its branches in the Atlantic region, and is maintaining contact with municipal, departmental and national authorities to ensure good coordination. The Honduran Red Cross has established an information and coordination centre in the Ceiba branch. In the north of the country, National Intervention Team members have been activated to respond should the need arise. The National Society has also mobilized resources to conduct a possible damage and needs assessment, which could be done as early as Friday. In addition, it is expected that in the coming days an agreement will be signed with the World Food Programme to provide food rations during times of emergency with the support of volunteer personnel.

Jamaica

The Jamaica Red Cross has been providing relief items including blankets, water and hygiene kits to people in shelters, in addition to managing several of these shelters. The JRC has also assisted in the evacuation of several families to shelters. All JRC Branches were on alert throughout the weekend and National Intervention Team and Community Disaster Response Teams were activated. The Jamaica Red Cross continues to work closely with the National Office for Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management and other agencies to provide assistance to people affected by flooding. The main needs at this time are for food, mattresses and bedding.

Mexico

The Deputy Coordinator for Domestic Emergencies of the Mexican Red Cross is currently working in PADRU, which is facilitating coordination between the Mexican Red Cross and PADRU as they monitor the developing situation. MRC National Intervention Teams have been deployed to the Yucatan Peninsula. The Mexican Red Cross relief director is in the state of Quintana Roo, where the MRC is setting up an operations centre. The National Society has already sent 28 tonnes of food supplies to the area, and another 20 are en route.

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