

Cuba after Melissa: Reconstruction is slowly progressing



Cleanup work in Las Tunas province (Source: [Tiempo21](#))

Just over a week after [Hurricane Melissa](#) struck, Cuba is still struggling with the aftermath of the storm. The damage report [presented by](#) the Office of the President at a meeting of the National Defense Council last week shows the extent of the devastation: 76,689 residential buildings were damaged, 4,743 of which were completely destroyed. In a [recent estimate](#), the United Nations even puts the number of residential buildings affected at around 90,000.

Due to ongoing flooding, 54,000 people are still staying in evacuation centers or with relatives days after the storm. Now that the last warnings for the province of Granma have been lifted, they too can slowly begin to return home.

On October 29, Melissa crossed the eastern part of the island as a Category 3 hurricane with peak wind speeds of nearly 200 kilometers per hour, leaving behind torrential rains with precipitation of up to 400 liters per square meter.

Power supply remains the biggest problem

The situation is particularly dramatic when it comes to the power supply – especially in Santiago de Cuba. As Energy Minister Vicente de la O Levy [announced](#) on Monday, only 29.23 percent of customers in the country's second-largest city have power again. The low rate is due to massive damage to the distribution networks, the minister explained at the crisis meeting chaired by President Miguel Díaz-Canel.

The situation is much better in other affected provinces: Las Tunas has restored 99.95 percent, Guantánamo 96.45 percent, and Holguín 79.76 percent.

The government has mobilized additional resources for Santiago de Cuba, where 187,000 customers are waiting for electricity. According to the state-run website Cubadebate, 3,746 technicians are currently working to repair power lines in the eastern region, with additional

crews from other provinces set to follow. De la O Levy assured that all customers in the provincial capital would have power again by the end of this week.

In Granma, 73.44 percent of electricity customers are back on the grid after the province, which was hit by severe flooding, was reconnected to the national power grid on Monday. Granma had been disconnected from the grid after the hurricane knocked down six high-voltage pylons on the 220-kilovolt line between Cueto and Bayamo.

The People's Republic of China [donated](#) 5,000 solar panels, each with a capacity of 2,000 watts, to help supply electricity in remote rural areas. Aid supplies also arrived from Venezuela, Germany, Norway, Canada, Colombia, and India. The United Nations approved US\$74 million in funding to support reconstruction efforts.

Water supply and infrastructure

The situation regarding water supply is mixed. According to Antonio Rodríguez, president of the National Institute of Water Resources, 96 percent of the population in Guantánamo is once again receiving water through the usual channels, while in Holguín the figure is 83 percent. The situation is more problematic in Santiago de Cuba and Granma, where only 57 and 55 percent of the population, respectively, are receiving regular supplies again. The rest are receiving water via tankers.

The education sector has also suffered considerable damage: 2,117 schools and educational institutions were damaged, but around half of these have already been repaired. As many school buildings are being used as emergency shelters, the return to normal teaching will be “asymmetrical and dependent on local conditions,” explained Education Minister Naima Ariatne Trujillo.



Road damage in eastern Cuba after Melissa (as of November 6). Red: impassable, yellow: passable with caution (source: Mitrans/[Cubadebate](#))

In the health sector, 642 facilities have been affected, including hospitals, polyclinics, doctors' offices, and pharmacies. Most of the affected facilities are located in Santiago de Cuba (231) and Granma (144). So far, only around four percent have been able to resume operations.

Agriculture has recorded preliminary damage at 78,700 hectares, more than half of which is banana plantations. The UN [estimates that](#) the amount of agricultural area affected is 100,000 hectares.

Trains have been running again between Havana and Holguín since Monday. The main line on the west-east axis was [damaged over](#) several kilometers, which is why connections to Guantánamo and Santiago de Cuba are still interrupted. Intercity buses [have been running](#) again to all destinations since last Tuesday, but some of them have to take alternative routes.

Last regions return to normal

Yanetsy Terry, governor of Granma, reported that the floods in Río Cauto were gradually receding.

On Monday, the National Civil Defense Staff announced the [lifting of the last remaining warnings](#) in the flooded areas of the province. The reconstruction phase has begun for the municipalities of Río Cauto and Cauto Cristo in Granma, which were particularly affected by flooding from the river of the same name—Cuba's most water-rich waterway.

Despite the severe devastation, Cuba did not suffer any fatalities as a result of Melissa – in contrast to Jamaica, Haiti, and the Bahamas, where the storm claimed dozens of lives. A total of 1.31 million people were evacuated in the run-up to the hurricane. ([Cubaheute](#))