

Hurricane Melissa devastates eastern Cuba



Flooded road in the municipality of Caimanera (Guantánamo) (Source: [Venceremos/X](#))

Hurricane Melissa left a trail of destruction in its wake after sweeping through eastern Cuba. President Miguel Díaz-Canel visited Santiago de Cuba on Friday to assess the damage on the ground, having already toured the provinces of Holguín and Granma on Thursday. Exact figures on the number of dead and injured are not yet available.

The storm made landfall in Chivirico (Santiago de Cuba province) at 3:05 a.m. on October 29. Fortunately for Cuba, the [former Category 5 storm weakened](#) after its devastating passage through Jamaica and hit the socialist island as a Category 3 hurricane with sustained winds of 195 (instead of the previous 280) kilometers per hour.

Massive rainfall and flooding

In addition to the winds, the most devastating effects were caused by the extreme rainfall. Within just 48 hours, an average of 46 millimeters of rain fell across the country, which is 30 percent of the usual October rainfall. The eastern region saw 134 millimeters, with Santiago de Cuba being the worst affected with 282 millimeters – equivalent to 158 percent of the historical October average.

Argelio Fernández Richelme from the National Institute of Water Resources reported extreme rainfall intensities: More than 55 weather stations recorded over 200 millimeters of rain in 48 hours, 28 stations reported more than 300 millimeters, and five stations reported over 500 millimeters. The La Majagua reservoir recorded 620 millimeters of rainfall in a single day.

Critical situation in the Cauto Basin

The situation in the [municipalities of Río Cauto and Cauto Cristo](#) in the [province of Granma](#) was particularly dramatic. Two days after the storm, thousands of people still had to be evacuated as the river reached its critical flood point. Between 5,000 and 7,000 people from communities such as Cauto Embarcadero, Melones, and Cayama were taken to Las Tunas.

The authorities warned of a “complex phenomenon” involving intense rainfall, dam discharges, runoff from the Sierra Maestra, and dangerous sea surges blocking the river mouth. The maximum risk would persist for up to 72 hours after the end of the rainfall, when the accumulated water masses would reach the lower-lying communities.



Flooding has led to evacuations in Granma province ([Lázaro Manuel Alonso/FB](#))

Extent of damage still unknown

Transportation Minister Eduardo Rodríguez Dávila reported significant damage to road infrastructure, cutting off several settlements and communities from the outside world. The ministry is working with the Ministry of Construction and the armed forces to restore transport links.

National bus services were gradually resumed from midnight on October 30, initially from Camagüey and from Las Tunas and Holguín towards the west. National train services remained suspended while specialists assessed the damage to the railways.

Frank País Airport in Holguín has already resumed domestic and international operations, while work is still underway to reopen Antonio Maceo International Airport in Santiago de Cuba.

Many Cubans suffered a heavy loss: the famous pilgrimage church of El Cobre in Santiago de Cuba was [damaged by](#) Melissa. “Melissa tore the sanctuary apart,” said Father Rogelio Dean, rector of the Catholic church. Several stained-glass windows were “unfortunately damaged” and water penetrated the building. Despite precautions such as installing aluminum frames and recessed screws to protect the glass windows, the hurricane “caused the masonry structures of the wall to collapse.” However, the basic structure of the building is intact. The village of the same name, where the church is located, also suffered massive damage.

Situation in tourism and industry

Tourism Minister Juan Carlos García Granda reported that the sector expects a quick recovery despite preliminary damage. Traffic to the Guardalavaca vacation destination is possible again, and power line crews are assessing the damage. Deputy Minister of Industry Yamilín González Milián reported only minor damage to industrial facilities, mainly to lightweight roofs and tiles, but this is not affecting production. The oxygen plant in Santiago de Cuba was not damaged. The solar parks in the eastern provinces also appear to have suffered little damage.

The feared nationwide collapse of the power grid did not occur. To prevent this, several power plants and main lines in the eastern part of the country were shut down in advance of the storm. Restoring power beyond emergency circuits will take some time, as numerous pylons were damaged.

Paradoxically, the hurricane also had positive effects: the country's water reservoirs filled by 1,005 million cubic meters within 48 hours – one of the largest increases in history. The national fill level rose from 55 to 66 percent of total capacity. Seventy-six reservoirs now have a fill level of over 95 percent, 61 are completely full, and 50 are overflowing.

International aid

Venezuela was the first country to [send](#) aid: a Conviasa airline plane brought 26 tons of humanitarian aid to Santiago de Cuba, including medical supplies, non-perishable food, and building materials. Foreign Minister Yván Gil announced another 3,000 tons of aid by ship.

China and the United Nations in Cuba have also pledged support, according to Deputy Foreign Minister Déborah Rivas Saavedra. Dozens of countries and organizations have declared their willingness to help.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, on the other hand, excluded Cuba from US disaster relief, although he announced support for other affected Caribbean countries such as Jamaica, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and the Bahamas. Later, the State Department announced aid after all, [referring](#) to the embargo legislation.

As is customary in disasters of this magnitude, the Cuban government has approved an aid package with 50 percent discounts on building materials for people whose homes have been partially or completely damaged. In addition, the state will cover interest and fees for bank loans for restoration, as Deputy Minister of Finance Maritza Cruz García explained.

A total of around 735,000 people were evacuated in the six affected provinces of Granma, Santiago de Cuba, Guantánamo, Holguín, Las Tunas, and Camagüey. ([Cubaheute](#))