



MEXICO EARTHQUAKES AND CARIBBEAN HURRICANES

CRS and its local Catholic partners respond to back-to-back disasters in Mexico and across the Caribbean with urgent humanitarian relief

UNITED STATES

MEXICO

CARIBBEAN



A collapsed building in the Lindavista neighborhood of Mexico City. Photo by Benedicte Desrus/Alamy Live News

EARTHQUAKES IN MEXICO

Buildings across Mexico City collapsed in a 7.1 magnitude earthquake that struck on September 19. The quake came just 11 days after an 8.1 magnitude quake had struck off Mexico's west coast near the states of Chiapas and Oaxaca. Both caused extensive damage. Crews and volunteers have been working day and night in Mexico City, hoping to find survivors. A reported 324 people were killed in the disaster, and more than 100 people have been rescued from collapsed buildings.

\$4 million

ESTIMATED NEED FOR
CRS RELIEF AND RECOVERY EFFORTS
ACROSS MEXICO AND THE CARIBBEAN

Public transportation is almost back to normal, and Mexico City's airport restarted operations with only one tower. Phone and internet providers are offering free services in more than 5,500 sites, and 85 percent of electricity has been restored. The National Center for Epidemiological Contingencies and Disasters, or CENACED, has organized an emergency response to provide specialized machinery in the areas where buildings have collapsed. CENACED is coordinating volunteers, collection points, donations and rescue efforts from the Mexico City authorities, the federal government and more than 30 businesses.

The September 19 earthquake came on the 32nd anniversary of another fatal 8.1-magnitude earthquake that hit Mexico City, killing more than 10,000 people. Just 2 hours before the latest quake hit, authorities in the city had organized an earthquake drill to commemorate the 1985 earthquake.

CRS RESPONSE

Catholic Relief Services' office in Mexico City is open and the agency is responding. All staff and partners are safe.

The Tehuantepec Diocesan Commission is CRS' main partner in Oaxaca state, where needs are significant and houses have been severely damaged. There, CRS teams are evaluating Santa Maria Huatulco and Salina Cruz ports, and San Francisco de Ixhuatan as options for procuring and transporting key emergency supplies from local markets.

In response to the second quake in central Mexico, CRS is supporting diocesan partners in Puebla and Morelos states so that they can provide immediate assistance.

Priorities include:

- Emergency shelter supplies
- Water, sanitation and hygiene
- Food assistance through community kitchens
- Full relief and recovery interventions for targeted communities in the Tehuantepec Diocese in Oaxaca, including repair and construction of damaged homes, and latrine rehabilitation and construction

"Mexico's soul was shaken, but everybody is focused on helping and bringing hope to those in need."

Cecilia Suarez, CRS Head of Operations in Mexico City

HURRICANES IRMA AND MARIA



Damage on Tortola, the largest of the British Virgin Islands, after Hurricane Irma struck earlier this month. Photo by CRS staff

Hurricane Irma

Across the Caribbean, catastrophic Category 5 Hurricane Irma left death and destruction in its path, affecting 500,000 people and claiming at least 34 lives. The hurricane made landfall in the Leeward Islands as a Category 5 storm on September 5, and again on the northern coast of Cuba on September 7, before it turned toward Florida. Most of the deaths and the most severe damage are being reported in the small islands of Antigua, Barbuda, Saint Martin and San Bartolome in the Leeward Islands, and in the northern coastal provinces of Cuba.

Although the eye of the hurricane did not make landfall in the Dominican Republic or Haiti, the storm brought rain and wind to three departments of Haiti (Nord Ouest, Nord and Nord Est, with a combined population of 2 million) and five provinces of the Dominican Republic (Samana, Maria Trinidad Sanchez, Espaillat, Puerto Plata and Monte Cristi, with a combined population of 1 million). In the Dominican Republic, Caritas partners report that 3,000 families have lost their homes, as well as access to safe drinking water and livelihoods. Damage to 30 aqueducts has affected the drinking water of 1 million people. On Haiti's north coast, 4,900 houses were damaged and another 466 were destroyed.

Hurricane Irma killed at least 10 people in Cuba, damaging nearly every region, including Havana, after making landfall in the eastern part of Cayo Romano and sweeping over 1,240 miles of Cuba's northern provinces.

Irma's 155 mph winds led to extensive flooding, damage to water infrastructure, fallen trees, destroyed homes and the collapse of the electrical and telephone systems. An estimated 187,000 homes, 1,600 health centers and 1,400 schools have been damaged or destroyed.

More than 1 million people were evacuated. Much of the northern provinces remain without power, and 3.1 million people are without water. A reported 559,000 people lack access to basic nutrition because food production and supply chains have been reduced by 50 percent.

Hurricane Maria

Ten days after Hurricane Irma struck the region, another Category 5 storm, Hurricane Maria, made landfall on the island of Dominica on September 18, with winds of up to 160 mph. It is the first time in the island's history that a Category 5 hurricane has made landfall there. The Caribbean's Disaster Emergency Management Agency, or CDEMA, reports that the whole island has been affected. Over 70 percent of homes have lost their roofing. More than 300 rivers have overflowed, flooding many towns, including the capital city of Roseau. The official death toll in Dominica has risen to nine. Communication infrastructure has been destroyed and ham radios are the only means of contact with the outside world.

Although the Dominican Republic did not sustain a direct hit from Hurricane Maria, 27 provinces received torrential rain and flooding. The diocese of La Vega reports "never before seen" flooding. An estimated 10,930 people remain in over 200 shelters, and 7,000 people are staying in neighbors' homes. At least 110 houses have been destroyed, and almost 3,000 homes damaged. Damage to four bridges has resulted in 38 communities being isolated.

In the British Virgin Islands, power has been restored, but damage to roofs and mountain roads has been reported. The government will continue to distribute food and water for 2 to 3 more weeks before turning its attention to recovery efforts. In Tortola, the government estimates that about 8,000 households are severely affected, 50 percent of them renters.

CRS RESPONSE

CRS is prioritizing efforts in the Dominican Republic, Cuba and the Antilles, and coordinating with Caritas partners, the United Nations and humanitarian actors. Priorities will evolve based on need and include:

- Emergency shelter, including tarps and other materials
- Access to water, and rehabilitation of public water supply systems
- Emergency living supplies, including kitchen sets and hygiene materials
- Hygiene education to prevent waterborne illnesses
- City and neighborhood cleanup through work programs
- House repair and reconstruction
- Livelihoods recovery
- Technical support for local partners

In Cuba, CRS and Caritas partners have reached 7,000 families with prepared food and hygiene kits. CRS and five Caritas diocesan partners in the Dominican Republic have provided 1,750 families with hygiene kits using vouchers. In the Dominican Republic, we have distributed tarps across five dioceses and, in the Antilles, we are working with Caritas Antilles to explore providing cash grants, through debit cards, for shelter repair, and other relief and recovery needs, on the islands of Tortola and Virgin Gorda in the British Virgin Islands.

Based on the capacity of local markets, assistance will be provided through direct distributions or cash grants to purchase supplies in local markets.

"Water and food are priorities now. I am concerned about the use of the water from rivers for drinking and have noticed people walking around with empty buckets. There is no distinction between the rich and the poor. People are in need."

Dianne Jhariah-Robinson,
Caritas Antilles

HOW TO HELP

To support Mexico Earthquake and Caribbean Hurricanes response:

- Donate online: donate.crs.org
- Donate by phone: 877-HELP-CRS
- Donate by check: "Mexico Earthquake and Caribbean Hurricanes Response," Catholic Relief Services, P.O. Box 17090, Baltimore, Maryland 21297-0303

