

**Situation Report 27 – Caribbean Hurricane Season
11 November 2008**

HIGHLIGHTS

- Assessments continue to evaluate the damages following Hurricane “Paloma”, the 16 named tropical system and the seventh hurricane of the 2008 Atlantic season.



SITUATION

1. Coming toward the end of the Atlantic hurricane season on November 30, Tropical Storm “Paloma” has transformed into the seventh Hurricane of the season, passed near the Cayman Islands, and made landfall in Cuba, near Santa Cruz del Sur, on 8 November, as a Category 4 hurricane. “Paloma” quickly weakened into a Category 3 hurricane with winds of 115 mph (185 km/hrs) and torrential rains, and further, to a tropical depression over Cuba. The remnant

of “Paloma” is centered along the north coast of Cuba, about 60 miles north of Camaguey. The re-development of this system is not expected due to strong upper-level winds. The U.S. National Hurricane Center in Miami reported that by Sunday morning, the Cuban and Bahamian governments had discontinued all warnings associated with “Paloma”.

REGIONAL OVERVIEW

CAYMAN ISLANDS

2. Preliminary estimates show that between 90 to 95 % of properties in Sister Islands, Cayman Brac and Little Cayman suffered damages, including schools. The impact in the Cayman Islands was mainly on Cayman Brac and Little Cayman, with “Paloma” downing trees, flooding low-lying areas and ripping off roofs. The fall of trees also affected the electric lines. According to the Hazard Management Committee, no injuries were reported. A Red Cross shelter was opened due to the heavy and continuous rainfall. Local authorities, led by the Ministry of District Administration, Planning, Agriculture and Housing (DAPAH), are responding to the situation. The National Hurricane Committee (NHC) set up its Emergency Operations Centre at the Owen Roberts International Airport. A disaster management volunteer from Grand Cayman was positioned in Cayman Brac to lend support to the local Red Cross branch. First aid teams had been notified and pre-assigned to respective shelters, while stocks have been checked in the Grand Cayman warehouse prior to the hurricane.

CUBA

3. While Cuba is recovering from the enormous damage caused by hurricanes “Gustav” and “Ike” and tropical storms “Fay” and “Hanna”, hurricane “Paloma” lashed the Cuban central-eastern portion 10 weeks after. The losses caused by this hurricane add to the USD 8.6 billion in total losses left by hurricanes Gustav and Ike as reported in *Granma* newspaper. Hurricane “Paloma” lunged at Santa Cruz del Sur, with wind gusts of up to 215 km/hour and waves that penetrated 1.5 kilometers inland. During its passage through the Cuban territory from the southwest to the northwest, “Paloma” weakened as it made landfall and clashed with unfavorable strong winds, causing it to lose force quickly and to come out on the north coast as a tropical depression. No human lives were lost. The Cuban authorities are currently carrying out preliminary damage assessments.

4. More than 1.2 million persons were evacuated by the Civil Defense in less than 48 hours. According to “Granma” newspaper, 18% of the evacuated (or 220,000 persons) were in 1,448 shelters, the rest staying with friends and family. Some 4,000 vehicles, 13 trains and other transportation means supported these evacuations; 927 food processing centers and 72 soup kitchens were opened. Some of the protective measures for the agricultural, livestock and fishing sectors included the transfer of a total of 237,000 animals to less vulnerable areas and the shielding of crops. Mechanical equipment or installations were disassembled and transferred to safer areas (for example, 196 irrigation systems and high-sea fishing boats were protected). Priority was given to the protection of food supplies in ports, warehouses and stores. Medicines and first-aid kits were made available; the communication network ensuring information and the exchange of instructions was deployed.

5. The hardest-hit municipalities were Santa Cruz del Sur, Najasa and Guáimaro in Camaguey province and Amancio Rodríguez in Las Tunas province. In addition to the specific damage caused in various sectors, there is a large number of personal belongings and assets of all types that were lost, such as cooking utensils, clothing and furniture.

6. A preliminary report indicates the loss of 24.5 *caballerías* (1 *caballería* equals 13.4 hectares) of various crops, which were already in the recovery phase after the passage of Hurricane Ike. Banana is one of the most affected crops. There are reports of affected groceries, warehouses and food dispensing outlets. Disruptions in the fishing and sugar industry are also reported. Electricity is yet to be restored in communities in Las Tunas and Camaguey. There is also damage to the road infrastructure on the southern coasts of Camaguey and Las Tunas provinces. In the housing sector, in Santa Cruz municipality, over 4,000 houses are reported to be damaged. In the seaside village of La Playa, more than 400 out of a total number of 440 homes were totally destroyed, accounting for 91% the houses. In Santiago de Cuba

province, because of the flooding of the Contramaestre and the Mogote rivers, some 7,000 farmers and 4 school centers in the area of Arroyo Rico are cut off. Due to rise of the Avispero River, some 4,700 villagers of La Plata, La Magdalena and Ocuajal del Turquino are isolated.

7. The United Nations System (UNS) in Cuba maintains its disaster management mechanisms activated. The Cuba UN Country Team and UNETE are engaged in close monitoring of the current situation and the preliminary evaluation of the severe disruptions. The headquarters and regional agencies of the United Nations System are in contact with their Cuba-based agencies.

8. The European Commission, through its Humanitarian Aid department (ECHO), is currently funding five relief projects in Cuba from a € million allocation that was provided following Hurricanes “Gustav” and “Ike”, which hit Cuba in August and September 2008. ECHO is considering further support to Cuba.

REGIONAL RESPONSE

9. The OCHA Regional Office in Panama is monitoring the situation and is in close contact with the Resident Coordinators and UNETTES of the affected countries in the region.

10. The British Red Cross released an initial £15,000 (or approximately USD 23,500) to assist affected persons with food and shelter in the Grand Cayman Islands. The IFRC/Pan American Disaster Response Unit (PADRU) based in Panama and the Regional Representatives in Trinidad and Tobago have been coordinating early response activities with the Overseas Branch of the British Red Cross in Cayman Islands and the Bahamas Red Cross Society. The International Federation is on stand-by to support the British Red Cross as they will be leading any support if needed. IFRC/PADRU has emitted an alert for a Regional Intervention Team (RIT) member to be deployed immediately to Cayman Islands. Additionally, the Regional Representative in Dominican Republic has been in constant communication with the Cuban Red Cross to discuss early preparation and emergency response activities.

11. More information can be found on Reliefweb at www.reliefweb.int and REDHUM at www.redhum.org. More information on the hurricanes and storms can be found at <http://www.nhc.noaa.gov> and for Cuba on the United Nations Website in Cuba at www.onu.org.cu. Humanitarian organizations and donors are encouraged to report all contributions (cash and in-kind) to OCHA's Financial Tracking Service at fts@reliefweb.int or through the on-line contribution format www.reliefweb.int/fts, where a list of already made contributions is available.

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