

Cuba, In The Wake Of Hurricane Paloma

Residents Reeling From Two Powerful Hurricanes This Year Woke Up To Yet More Destruction

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Cubans already reeling from two devastating hurricanes this year woke up to scenes of yet more destruction.

The first pictures coming out of Santa Cruz del Sur, where [late-season Hurricane Paloma made landfall Saturday evening as a Category 3 storm](#), reveal a cat's cradle of wooden beams and bricks – all that is left of this city of some 10,000 people.

A massive evacuation operation protected lives here where nearly 76 years ago to the day a hurricane left 3,000 dead.

There are no estimates yet of the latest economic damage, but observers say infrastructure took less of a hit than was feared. Still, for the local residents of this south central fishing community, the personal property losses are huge.

Civil defense workers and some dogs can be seen picking their way through the rubble dominating the landscape where only an occasional house has been left standing. The main communication tower was brought down, broken in half like a toothpick, by hurricane force winds of 120 mph. Storm surge drove sea waters for a mile inland as four-foot-high waves swamped wooden homes closest to the coast.

Trees and shrubs bordering the sea look like clotheslines festooned with sheets and shirts, tossed there by the wind as walls went down. Refrigerators and washing machines were picked up like children's toys, according to residents, and have been left lying in the sand.

Paloma weakened as it sped northward over central Cuba, finally departing in the early hours of Sunday as a tropical depression.

Earlier this year, Hurricanes Ike and Gustav caused damage topping \$8 billion and destroyed one-third of the island's food crops. And rain and flooding from Paloma have reportedly destroyed fields planted with quick-growing crops that the Government has promoted in an effort to avoid greater food shortages.

Since it was hit by the first two storms in August-September, the Communist government has accepted aid from the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, various U.N. agencies, and from countries ranging from Russia, Brazil, Mexico and Canada to China and Venezuela. It's come in the form of food, water filters, temporary shelter materials, mosquito netting, mattresses and other necessities.

One country Cuba says it won't take aid from is the United States, which offered \$5 million after Hurricanes Ike and Gustav.

Vice President Jose Ramon Machado, in Santa Cruz this morning to assess the damage, reiterated the government's refusal saying, "We already gave our opinion about this, we made our point clear. The problem here is the embargo; that is what is causing the real damage. It's been going on for 40 years. That's what must be evaluated when people talk about 'aid,' the rest is pure hypocrisy."

Instead of handouts, Havana wants the U.S. to allow them to buy the needed food and construction materials without demanding cash in advance, and without the slew of restrictions that now govern one-way trade between the two nations (as Washington prohibits the importation of any goods from Cuba).

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