

Hurricane Matthew hits Haiti and heads north

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With winds as high as 145 miles per hour, Hurricane Matthew made landfall around 7 a.m. Tuesday near the town of Les Anglais in Haiti's Sud Department on the Tiburon Peninsula. Les Anglais is approximately 20 miles west of the much larger commune of Les Cayes, where floodwaters were reported to be shoulder high.

The eye of Hurricane Matthew made landfall near the eastern tip of Cuba on Tuesday night, and continued to be a powerful, Category 4 hurricane, with sustained winds of 140 mph. Matthew was expected to move across Cuba Tuesday night and pass over the southeastern Bahamas overnight before heading north to Florida and the US Southeast.

In Haiti, the storm moved north over the Gulf of Gonave, threatening regions of Haiti as far north as Ile de la Tortue. As of 5 p.m. Tuesday the hurricane's center was located less than 100 miles southwest of Cap-Haïtien, a city of nearly 200,000 people, and tropical storm force winds were blowing as far out as 175 miles from the eye.

In eastern Cuba, across the Windward Passage from Haiti, the government was evacuating more than 300,000 people in anticipation of landfall there. The US National Weather Service predicted that Matthew would maintain its intensity as it moved north from Cuba toward the Bahamas, where it posed significant dangers.

In Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, the winds were less strong but flooding from the hurricane killed three children. As much as two feet of rain was predicted for parts of Haiti, and the storm surge along the southern coast was 10 feet high on Tuesday morning.

As of Tuesday afternoon, *Haiti Libre* was reporting a dangerous rise in the height of the Rivière Grise, which risked overflowing its banks east of Port-au-Prince and

flooding the neighborhoods of Damien, Tabarre and Cité Soleil. Nearly seven years after the 2010 earthquake, more than 60,000 people in and around the Haitian capital are still homeless; millions are living in conditions so precarious that they are effectively without defense against the storm. There have been numerous press reports of people refusing to leave their shanties for fear that what little they own would be looted.

In anticipation of the storm, the Haitian government banned all air traffic and maritime activities between Monday morning and Wednesday evening. Schools were closed on Monday and Tuesday, but many were then converted to emergency shelters with inadequate provisions. The *Miami Herald* interviewed a Port-au-Prince resident who spent Monday night in a shelter with 150 other people.

"The situation makes you feel bad," said Jesula Bastien. "You look around and realize that you're sleeping on the floor with your kids. But what else can I do? I don't have any economic means so I have no other choice but to come here with them."

In the Nippes Department, the storm blew the roof off of a presbytery that was serving as a shelter. As of Tuesday night, Haiti had seen only three deaths from the storm, but there were reports of widespread damage to farms and livestock flocks across the Tiburon Peninsula.

A bridge over the Rivière la Digue on the north coast of the peninsula was washed away by floods. National Route 2 was made impassible by the collapse, cutting off one of the only overland routes to the area.

Flooding from the storm will put the Haitian population at increased risk of disease for months to come. The cholera epidemic, introduced to Haiti by UN soldiers from Nepal in 2010, was already growing in

intensity again this year. Mosquitos breeding after the storm will also spread the Zika and chikungunya viruses in a country where people often have to walk hours to reach a medical clinic.

A century of US imperialism has left Haiti so destitute that it cannot provide for its people after a natural disaster. Nonetheless, the Obama administration is adding to the cruelty by deporting thousands of Haitian immigrants who have tried to enter the US through California. In a September 22 statement announcing the deportation policy, Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson claimed that conditions in Haiti had “improved sufficiently to permit the U.S. government to remove Haitian nationals on a more regular basis.”

US interference in Haitian politics has also rendered the country’s comprador bourgeoisie incapable of holding elections. A vote to replace former President Michel Martelly—who himself was put in place by the Obama administration under Hillary Clinton’s state department—was supposed to have taken place in 2015 but was postponed because of corruption. (See Haiti: “What the Clinton emails reveal about US election-rigging”) It had been rescheduled for this coming Sunday, but may be delayed again because of the storm.

Further political turmoil could develop out of the storm’s damage. Guy Philippe, a former protégé of US Special Forces who was instrumental in the 2004 coup against Jean-Bertrand Aristide, is now based on the north coast of the Tiburon Peninsula and has been charged in court for a May attack on the Les Cayes police station that killed one and injured five.



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