

Record-setting Hurricane Eta batters Central America

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3 November 2020

Hurricane Eta intensified at an almost unprecedented pace Tuesday, reaching winds surpassing 150 mph before hitting Puerto Cabezas, the largest town in the North Caribbean Coast Autonomous Region of Nicaragua, with a population of over 60,000.

The Nicaraguan authorities have already reported significant flooding, along with damage to homes and public infrastructure. More than 30,000 people were evacuated from Puerto Cabezas and other coastal communities.

Hundreds have already been evacuated in neighboring Honduras due to severe flooding as the hurricane drops massive quantities of water from the Caribbean Sea and Pacific Ocean on the impoverished Central American isthmus. The Honduran chief of emergency operations, Marvin Aparicio, reported the death of a child due to a landslide, which is still being investigated.

In an already record-setting 2020 Atlantic hurricane season, Hurricane Eta neared Category 5 (157 mph or higher). Some models indicate that it might have reached this category before landfall, which would make it the first Atlantic storm to reach Category 5 in November since 1932.

Eta matched the 2005 record as the 28th named storm in the Atlantic hurricane season, which specialists indicate is far from over. This season has been particularly exacerbated by higher-than-average sea surface temperatures in the Caribbean and Atlantic due to global warming. Conditions from the Pacific caused by the La Niña have also contributed.

After reaching Category 1 late Sunday night, the US National Hurricane Center forecasted that it would hit the coast as a Category 2 storm, but it picked up energy from the warm Caribbean waters at such speed that it reached almost Category 5 in just one day. Its pressure

fell to the lowest in this hurricane season, another measure of its strength.

Princeton University climate scientist Kieran Bhatia found that Eta's last three 24-hour intensity changes were "off the chart" compared to the Atlantic November storms since 1982.

Awestruck Brian McNoldy, senior research associate at the University of Miami, tweeted Monday night, "Absolutely unreal. Rarely do we witness this anywhere in the world. Eta became a monster today."

The storm follows Hurricane Zeta last week, which left millions without power and killed six in Louisiana, after reaching Category 2. On Sunday, on the Northwestern Pacific Ocean, Typhoon Goni reached the Philippines with 195 mph winds, making it the strongest landfalling tropical cyclone in recorded history. It left widespread flooding and destruction, with at least 20 dead reported so far.

The US National Hurricane Center (NHC) warned of a massive 14- to 21-foot storm surge in Nicaragua and "catastrophic, life-threatening flash flooding" across portions of all of Central America, as well as heavy rain in southern Mexico, Jamaica, the Cayman Islands and southern Haiti through Friday evening.

Costa Rica had reported 32 floods and eight landslides in the southwest due to the indirect impact of Hurricane Eta, with hundreds forced to go into shelters.

The danger of landslides and flooding is especially high in Guatemala and El Salvador. Just last Thursday at midnight, about 100 families were caught unawares by a landslide in the Salvadoran town of Nejapa, killing nine. According to *El Faro*, the government failed to communicate a warning of flooding upstream. El Salvador raised its emergency status to "red" over Hurricane Eta.

As the NHC warned on Monday night that

“preparations to protect life and property should now be complete” in Northeastern Nicaragua, residents in Puerto Cabezas were reporting on social media that they were being rejected from the scarce 17 shelters. Residents were seen scrambling around town in the dark with their belongings in search of shelter.

Several videos showed dozens of families crammed into churches and schools reporting that they had no mattresses, food, face masks or any means of preventing the spread of COVID-19. The town lost power early afternoon Monday due to falling trees and power lines.

Eta is expected to lose force rapidly after landfall, becoming a tropical depression as it cuts a path through Honduras. It will then turn to the northeast toward Cuba and the Gulf of Mexico, potentially returning to hurricane intensity.

Last year, the Germanwatch Global Climate Risk Index ranked Honduras and Nicaragua as the second and sixth countries most affected by extreme weather events, signaling vulnerability “where extreme events will become more frequent or more severe due to climate change.”

The floods, landslides, hurricanes and droughts that have ravaged the isthmus in recent years have greatly intensified social inequality and the resulting struggles of workers, peasants and youth against these social conditions. Especially since 2018, hundreds of thousands have joined mass caravans to migrate to the United States or participated in mass protests, roadblocks and strikes against the authoritarian regimes of Juan Orlando Hernández in Honduras and Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua, both of which have responded with police-state repression.

From the displacement to more precarious territories by landed oligarchs, mining, energy and agricultural corporations, to social austerity, the capitalist ruling elites across the region have long increased the vulnerability of the impoverished masses to extreme weather events by subordinating every aspect of social life to the profits of foreign and local investors.

Billions of dollars have been spent in the region by US imperialism to finance brutal regimes and paramilitary forces to crush any popular challenge to the super-exploitation of the Central American working class and the plundering of its natural resources and public coffers. At the same time, bourgeois nationalist

fronts and petty bourgeois guerrilla movements oriented to striking a better deal for the local elites with imperialism have thwarted an international struggle of workers against capitalism and for socialism.

As the COVID-19 pandemic runs rampant, all Central American governments are ending whatever economic assistance they provided and lifting economic restrictions. Honduras has reported 2,688 deaths and seen a continuous increase since early September, while the Sandinista administration in Nicaragua has brazenly sought to cover up the extent of the pandemic, reporting only 156 deaths.

There is no reformist solution within the capitalist nation-state system to lifting Central America out of its wrenching poverty, just like there is no magic bullet, like carbon taxes or profit incentives in renewable energies, to end global warming induced by greenhouse gas emissions, not to speak of sheltering the hundreds of millions that will inevitably be impacted in the short-term by its effects.

The blaming of the shortsightedness or venality of “human nature” by pseudo-left tendencies influenced by the Frankfurt School and other forms of anti-Marxism are only formulas used by affluent layers to conceal the fact that responsibility lies with capitalism and its division of a globalized economy and the global ecosystem into nation states competing to accumulate profits for their respective oligarchies.

These urgent issues can only be solved by the international political mobilization of the working class to expropriate the fortunes of the financial elites and major banks and corporations globally. Trillions of dollars from this social wealth must be used in programs to rebuild Central America, develop clean, safe and efficient energy and transportation systems and abolish all forms of social inequality.



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