

Hurricane Melissa strikes Jamaica, the most powerful storm in the island's recorded history

Kevin Reed
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The destructive force of Hurricane Melissa, the most powerful storm to ever strike Jamaica, hit the Caribbean island on Tuesday with winds and rainfall unseen in the country's recorded history.

As of Tuesday afternoon, the hurricane remains an active and powerful tropical cyclone, although downgraded to a Category 3 storm. After tearing through Jamaica, it is currently pushing northward with its eye projected to cross over Southeastern Cuba.

Melissa hit Jamaica as a Category 5 storm with maximum sustained winds of 185 mph (295 kph) and maintaining its status as the strongest tropical cyclone worldwide in 2025 so far.

According to the U.S. National Hurricane Center, the hurricane's slow pace has exacerbated the potential for catastrophic flooding and landslides both in Jamaica and on its projected path over Cuba.

Melissa made landfall in Western Jamaica early Tuesday afternoon, striking near the rural town of New Hope, approximately 62 kilometers (38 miles) south of Montego Bay, at the peak of its strength as a Category 5 hurricane.

This landfall is the first time in recorded history that Jamaica has taken a direct strike from a hurricane of this strength. The National Hurricane Center's advisory warned that "total structural failure" was likely in the storm's path, a prediction that has since been realized in the worst-hit parishes. Power outages erupted across the country with over a third of customers losing electricity.

Reports about the initial hours of landfall indicate the consequences have been devastating. The immense wind field knocked out electrical grids and communications, while the slow progression of the eye wall unleashed a "deluge of trillions of gallons of water," as described by disaster relief officials.

The International Federation of the Red Cross estimates that 1.5 million people—over half the island's population of 2.8 million—have been directly affected by the storm. As of

this writing, at least three deaths have been reported.

News reports say all fatalities occurred during storm preparations with two individuals killed by falling trees while removing them, and one person died from electrocution. Authorities note that the number will likely rise as communications are restored and rescue operations continue across the island.

Most injuries reported so far have also been linked to efforts to shutter buildings and secure rooftops, underscoring both the intensity of the storm and the desperate conditions that prevailed on the island as it approached.

Thousands have lost their homes and livelihoods. The government issued evacuation orders for 28,000 citizens, urging relocation to shelters. However, as of landfall, only around 6,000 had abandoned their homes. Recovery workers are warning that many districts, especially in the mountainous interior, may remain inaccessible for weeks due to landslides and collapsed infrastructure.

Hurricane Melissa has already surpassed every hurricane in Jamaica's meteorological archives in terms of wind strength and destructive potential. The two closest cited by meteorological historians are Hurricane Gilbert in 1988 and Hurricane Wilma in 2005. Gilbert struck Jamaica directly but as a slightly weaker system.

According to AccuWeather's lead hurricane expert, Alex DaSilva, "the island has never taken a direct hit from a Category 4 or 5 hurricane in recorded history," and the current devastation is "unlike anything people in Jamaica have seen before."

Gilbert, until today, was the last major hurricane to make landfall in Jamaica and left behind a legacy of flattened homes, destroyed crops and a protracted humanitarian crisis. Melissa's impact, however, is expected to eclipse Gilbert both in scale and intensity. Recovery is threatened by the storm's slower movement and consequent severe flooding.

As Melissa departs Jamaica, Cuban authorities are rushing to prepare Santiago de Cuba and the broader southeastern

coast for another direct strike. Authorities in Cuba have moved to suspend all business and educational activities, called for the mass evacuation of coastal zones and opened public shelters stocked with emergency supplies.

The United Nations, International Red Cross and various national militaries—including the UK Royal Navy—have positioned resources for immediate deployment once the hurricane’s eye passes. Jamaica, like Canada and Australia and 19 other countries, is part of the British Commonwealth.

Melissa’s projected track takes it northwestward, aiming directly for Southeastern Cuba. After crossing Cuba, forecasts from the National Hurricane Center suggest the hurricane will continue north into the Florida Straits, potentially threatening the Southern Florida Peninsula and the Bahamas with heavy rains, surging tides and damaging winds, though a US landfall remains uncertain at this time.

Weather experts have emphasized the extraordinary nature of Hurricane Melissa. The World Meteorological Organization’s tropical cyclone specialist Anne-Claire Fontan labeled it “the storm of the century for Jamaica.” The hurricane’s transformation “from a disorganized tropical storm to a Category 5” within 48 hours was described as unprecedented, raising troubling questions about the effects of global climate change and regional preparedness.

Brian Trascher of the United Cajun Navy warned, “Trillions of gallons of water are expected to fall on the country,” noting that this level of precipitation over already saturated ground represents a mortal danger for both rural and urban communities.

Disaster response and rescue specialists have offered critical assessments of both the Jamaican government’s preparations and the capacity of the population to weather such a massive storm. Jamaican Health Minister Dr. Christopher Tufton stressed the risks inherent in last-minute or self-managed preparations, linking most injuries to people falling from ladders or rooftops while attempting to secure their homes in inadequate conditions.

Rescue officials, including representatives from the International Federation of the Red Cross, estimate that upwards of half the national population faces direct or indirect risk. Emergency medical and search teams are laboring under circumstances complicated by widespread power loss, blocked roads and persistent rainfall.

The Jamaican government has declared a maximum alert state, but the response infrastructure—eroded by years of imperialist-imposed austerity and underinvestment—is vastly insufficient to meet the scale of devastation.

Researchers highlight the rapid intensification of the hurricane as a hallmark of climate change, enabled by exceptionally warm Caribbean waters and altered atmospheric patterns. A comprehensive meteorological

analysis noted that the “accelerated development likely created a significant preparedness deficit in the affected regions,” and that the storm’s size and ferocity represented a “worst-case” scenario forecast for the island of Jamaica.

Climate change experts reiterate longstanding warnings that Caribbean nations remain woefully underprepared for storms of this magnitude. Repeated calls for the expansion of disaster-mitigation infrastructure, early warning networks and robust emergency housing programs have been sidelined or underfunded under pressure from international creditors and a global system that prioritizes financial interests over human security. The present catastrophe is, therefore, not merely a natural disaster but a social and political one as well.

In the aftermath of the landfall, the Trump administration has issued limited statements expressing “deep concern” for the welfare of US citizens remaining in Jamaica and a readiness to “provide necessary humanitarian assistance.”

However, the administration’s current response to the disaster in Jamaica is little changed from that of Trump’s previous presidential term. This is a mix of handwringing phrases combined with a refusal to address the long-term consequences of climate policy neglect and economic austerity that have left Caribbean societies deeply exposed.

Neither the warnings of climate scientists, nor the lessons of prior disasters—including Hurricane Katrina that killed 1,833 people in August 2005—have been acted upon. The consequence is a humanitarian crisis that exposes the bankrupt priorities of the world capitalist system that prioritizes profit over human life on every front.



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