

# Hurricane Maria bears down on battered Caribbean

September 18 2017, by Amandine Ascensio With Jean-Philippe Ludon In Fort-De-France

---



A school is repaired in Marigot on the French Caribbean island of St Martin after Hurricane Irma battered the region earlier this month

Hurricane Maria strengthened Monday as it blasted towards the eastern Caribbean, a region already struggling to recover from megastorm Irma.

The US National Hurricane Center (NHC) said Maria had intensified to

a Category Two storm as it approached the French territory of Guadeloupe, the base for relief operations for several islands hit by Irma this month.

Guadeloupe was on "red alert" Monday with schools, businesses and government offices ordered to close, as was neighbouring Martinique, which is also part of France. Each has a population of around 400,000 people.

The hurricane, packing maximum sustained winds of 175 kilometres (110 miles) an hour according to the NHC, is expected to hit Guadeloupe at around midday local time (1600 GMT).

It was expected to strengthen further into a Category Three "major hurricane", the NHC warned.

Dominica, St Kitts and Nevis and the British island of Montserrat are also on alert.

French Interior Minister Gerard Collomb warned in Paris on Sunday that "we will have major difficulties" if Guadeloupe is hard hit, noting the territory was "the logistical centre from where we could supply St Martin and organise all the airlifts."

Irma killed 15 people on St Martin, an island shared by France and the Netherlands.

Officials in Guadeloupe predicted severe flooding in low-lying areas and urged residents to move to higher ground.

France, Britain and the Netherlands have been criticised for the pace of relief efforts and for struggling to contain lawlessness in their overseas territories amid widespread shortages of food, water and electricity after

Irma.

## 'Culture of risk'

But in Guadeloupe's capital Pointe-a-Pitre, local official Josette Borel-Lincertin said authorities had ample experience of preparing for hurricanes.



Fifteen people died from Irma on St Martin, an island shared by France and the Netherlands

"We have a culture of risk, we know what needs to be done," she said.

Collomb said an additional 110 soldiers would be deployed to the region to reinforce about 3,000 people already at work tackling security

problems, rebuilding infrastructure and supplying food and water to hurricane-hit islanders.

He said up to 500 more people could be sent if needed.

Irma, a Category Five hurricane, left around 40 people dead in the Caribbean before churning west and pounding Florida, where at least 20 people were killed.

As of 1200 GMT the storm was swirling about 85 miles (135 kilometres) east of Martinique, according to the NHC, on track to barrel across the eastern Caribbean late Monday and into the night.

Tropical storm warnings were in place in Antigua and Barbuda, Saba and St Eustatius, and St Lucia.

The tiny island of Barbuda was decimated by Hurricane Irma on September 5-6 when it made its first landfall in the Caribbean as a top-intensity Category Five storm.

The NHC said Maria could produce a "dangerous storm surge accompanied by large and destructive waves" that would raise water levels by four to six feet (1.2 to 1.8 metres) when it passes through the eastern Caribbean.

It also forecast maximum potential rainfall of 20 inches (51 centimetres) in the Leeward Islands, Puerto Rico and the US and British Virgin Islands through Wednesday night—conditions that could cause life-threatening flash floods and mudslides.

A second [hurricane](#), Jose, is also active in the Atlantic and has triggered tropical storm warnings for the northeastern United States.

Irma broke weather records when it whipped up winds of 295 kilometres per hour (183 miles per hour) for more than 33 continuous hours.

Many scientists are convinced that megastorms such as Irma, and Harvey before it, are intensified by the greater energy they can draw from oceans that are warming as a result of climate change.

© 2017 AFP

Citation: Hurricane Maria bears down on battered Caribbean (2017, September 18) retrieved 19 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2017-09-hurricane-maria-battered-caribbean.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.