

Puerto Rico braces for hit from Hurricane Dorian

August 28 2019, by Ivelisse Rivera



People gather at the coast hours before the Tropical Storm Dorian enters in Patillas, Puerto Rico on, August 28, 2019

Hurricane Dorian bore down on Puerto Rico Wednesday as residents braced for a direct hit, the first since the island was ravaged two years

ago by Hurricane Maria.

Even before the storm hit, an 80-year-old man was killed in a fall from a ladder while fixing a roof in a San Juan suburb, police said.

US forecasters said Dorian was upgraded to a hurricane from a tropical storm as it chugged near St. Thomas in the US Virgin Islands and was expected to make landfall in populous eastern Puerto Rico later Wednesday.

The latest path also puts Dorian on a trajectory to strike the Atlantic coast of Florida or Georgia by the weekend, with few obstacles to weaken it after Puerto Rico.

Residents of the seaside town of Fajardo, hard hit by Maria in 2017 and now directly in Dorian's path, scrambled to get ready, fueling their vehicles and stocking up on basic necessities.

Miguel Melendez joked that the popular tourist area has become a "welcome committee" for hurricanes.

"I went to bed more or less at ease," the 63-year-old retiree said. "But my sister woke me at 7:00 am to tell me: 'Look, this has changed, this is headed to the house again.'"

Carmen Donos exited a Fajardo supermarket Wednesday morning with a shopping cart loaded with "my little basic things, and some sweets for when I'm anxious because the lights have gone out."

The 49-year-old said she lost "absolutely everything" to flooding during Maria. "I definitely don't want to go through that again."



Workers put up storm shutters to protect a store in Humacao, Puerto Rico on, August 28, 2019

President Donald Trump declared a state of emergency in Puerto Rico, which is a US territory, authorizing federal assistance even as he lashed out at the island as "one of the most corrupt places on earth.

"Their political system is broken and their politicians are either Incompetent or Corrupt," he said on Twitter.

Evacuations were getting underway, starting with people living in Maria-damaged homes that still have blue tarps for roofs, Carlos Acevedo Caballero, head of the local emergency management agency, told reporters.

Some 30,000 houses in Puerto Rico have blue tarps where once they had roofs.

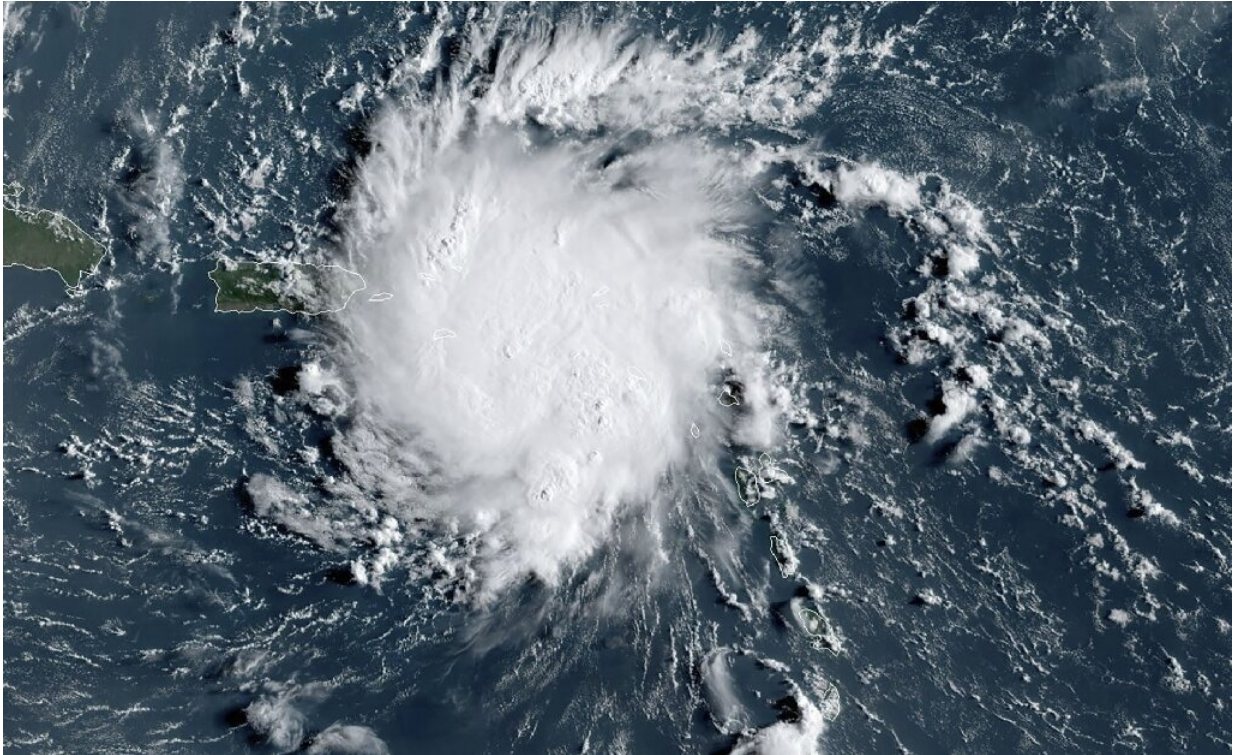
Maria, a Category 4 hurricane, shattered the island's already shaky power grid, overwhelmed public services and left many residents homeless.

A study accepted as valid by the government, which initially put the death toll at 64, estimated that nearly 3,000 people died as a result of the hurricane and the months of disruption that followed.

Dorian, though far less powerful than Maria, looms as the first major test of the island's halting recovery.

As of 1800 GMT, the storm was over St Thomas, packing 75-mile-an-hour (120-kilometer) winds.

It is forecast to dump four to six inches of rain on Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands.



This satellite image obtained from NOAA/RAMMB, shows Tropical Storm Dorian as it approaches Puerto Rico in the Caribbean at 11:40 UTC on August 28, 2019

Agents 'ready to respond'

Forecasters project that after it crosses Puerto Rico, the storm will move into the Atlantic. It is expected to follow a trajectory north of the Dominican Republic, the Bahamas and Turks and Caicos before swinging west toward Florida sometime over the weekend.

Florida Governor Ron DeSantis warned that Dorian could grow into a major hurricane as he warned people to get ready.

"All Floridians on the East Coast should have 7 days of supplies, prepare

their homes and follow the track closely," he tweeted.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency said some 3,000 agents had been deployed in Puerto Rico and were "ready to respond."

"Emergency communications, logistics & transportation teams are also positioned on the island," it said Tuesday on Twitter.

Puerto Rico's new governor, Wanda Vazquez, said the island was better prepared this time to respond to any contingency.

Former governor Ricardo Rossello was forced to resign last month in part because of criticism of his handling of the emergency created by Maria.

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