



PRESS RELEASE

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Hurricane Wilma: an example of effective early warning system

“What we are witnessing now in the Caribbean is an example of an effective working early warning system” says Salvano Briceño, Director of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction. “The timely warning messages provided by the US National Hurricane Center have been immediately channelled to media that are alerting populations and to civil protection services which are coordinating the mobilization.”

“It is a concrete illustration that demonstrates that preparedness can work. This might not avoid buildings being affected because of the unusual force of the hurricane, but at least lives will be saved,” he adds.

Wilma, a category five cyclone with winds stronger than 249 kilometres per hour can increase the water level by 5 metres and cause flooding up to six kilometres inland.

Officials in Mexico, Cuba and Florida in the United States have already evacuated thousands of people from areas threatened by the strongest hurricane ever recorded. Honduras and Guatemala have also issued alerts and are prepared for the worst. The level of response is massive and people in those regions are taking the alert very seriously.

Hurricanes are currently the category of hazards easiest to predict but evacuation and people response are the actions that make a difference. The awareness and preparedness reflect the political prevailing in Mexico, Cuba and the United States to reduce the impact of hurricanes. “We hope that governments will increasingly follow the guidelines from the Hyogo Framework for Action that promote disaster reduction and a better resilience to multiple hazards,” says Salvano Briceño.

Hurricane Wilma is the fiercest Atlantic hurricane ever recorded and is expected to be stronger than Katrina, which devastated New Orleans in August, and Rita that hit the Texas-Louisiana coast in September. It has already triggered mudslides that killed 10 people in Haiti.

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