

Gov’t Strengthens National Disaster Preparedness

WITH THE Atlantic Hurricane season now under way, the Government is taking steps to bolster Jamaica’s disaster preparedness and response systems.

Prime Minister, Dr. the Most Hon. Andrew Holness, has emphasised the urgent need to further support the country’s institutions to better withstand the impact of future storms.

“Through support from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Jamaica, now benefits from a robust national disaster emergency telecommunications system and public safety network.”

- Prime Minister

“Our approach includes strengthening national institutions and legislations; investing in science, technology and early warning systems; building capacity at the community level; aligning the national framework with climate resilience; and ensuring that disaster risk reduction is cross-cutting –



Prime Minister, Dr. the Most Hon. Andrew Holness, addresses the National Disaster Risk Management Council Meeting held recently at the Ministry of Local Government and Community Development on Hagley Park Road in Kingston.

touching education, housing, health, infrastructure, energy and the environment,” he said.

The Prime Minister was addressing the National Disaster Risk Management Council Meeting, held recently at the Ministry of Local Government and Community Development.

Dr. Holness informed that through support from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Jamaica, now benefits from a robust national disaster emergency telecom-

munications system and public safety network.

“These allow us to disseminate real-time alerts, mobilise response teams, and reach even our most remote communities in times of crisis,” he said.

Work is also under way to equip key National Water Commission (NWC) pumping stations with backup generators, to ensure continued public access to water in the event of a natural disaster.

“That’s a long-term objective. But we’re going to ensure that we, at least, have some short-term capabilities. It is a two-pronged strategy. One strategy is to solarise some of the pumping stations that we have so that we have independent power, and the other strategy is to introduce generators that can carry the pumps for a reasonable period of time should there be a failure in the electricity utility,” he stated.

Hurricane Preparedness Tips for Fishers

WITH FORECASTS predicting an active hurricane season, the region’s fishers are being encouraged to reinforce their safety protocols.

Statistics and Information Analyst at the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM) and former Fisheries Officer at Jamaica’s National Fisheries Authority, June Masters, shared tips for fishers at a recent webinar, held under the theme: ‘Disaster Preparedness – Fisheries’.

One of the first steps that she recommended is obtaining an insurance policy that will provide protection and peace of mind in the event of damage to equipment or fishing vessels.

The Information Analyst noted that having a family emergency plan is also a great idea.

“Hurricanes, storms, bad weather will happen, and you need to be prepared. So have that in mind. As a fisher, prepare yourself for disasters. Prepare your buildings, prepare your vessels, prepare your gears, all your assets that you have,” Mrs. Masters added.

To ensure that they are fully prepared, she explained that fishers also need to stay informed during the season.

She noted that once it is declared that a storm/hurricane is expected to impact the country, it is important for fishers to secure their vessels and their gears.

The CRFM advises fishers to remove boats from the water if they can and take them to approved marine shelters or store them in a warehouse.

If they are unable to do so, the entity encourages them to leave the boats in the water in a protected marina/harbour or hurricane hole (an area that has a history of providing safe refuge during storms).

Items such as fish pots should also be removed from the water at the first warning of a hurricane or storm.



Fishing vessels on a beach on Jamaica’s south coast.

Disaster Financing Coverage Stands at \$130.6 Billion

JAMAICA HAS entered the 2025 Atlantic Hurricane Season with disaster financing coverage valued at \$130.6 billion.

Minister of Finance and the Public Service, Hon. Fayval Williams, advised that the coverage increased by \$6.5 billion since the passage of Hurricane Beryl in July 2024.

“How much we can draw down on that depends on the severity of the disaster. Our disaster financing policy takes into consideration those events that are high frequency but low severity, such as floods, and these can be dealt with through budget reallocation or reserve and the contingency funds to provide immediate resources for relief efforts,” she said.

Mrs. Williams noted that for high-severity, low-frequency events such as hurricanes, the Government has

to be prepared to use insurance instruments such as the Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility (CCRIF).

Meanwhile, the Government has earmarked \$2.8 billion for repairs and upgrades to the national gully network, and critical flood management works.

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- Finance Minister

Minister without Portfolio in the Ministry of Economic Growth and Job Creation with responsibility for Works,

Hon. Robert Morgan, said approximately \$2 billion has been allocated for comprehensive gully works.

A significant portion of the funds will be allocated to works along the Sandy Gully and its tributaries in the Corporate Area, as well as the North and South Gullies in St. James.

“These improvements are not only critical to flood control, but also for public health and urban development, protecting vulnerable communities and ensuring a sustainable future for Jamaicans,” he said.

Mr. Morgan added that the Government is intensifying its flood management efforts through a series of strategic interventions aimed at mitigating the devastating impacts of flooding.

“For this financial year,

some \$825 million has been allocated across various activities,” he further indicated.

The interventions include river training works to redirect and stabilise water flow; rehabilitation of eroded gullies; and critical upgrades to the country’s drainage systems.

Shelters in a State of Readiness

MINISTER OF Local Government and Community Development, Hon. Desmond McKenzie, has assured that the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management (ODPEM) is fully resourced—financially and operationally—to meet the demands of the anticipated active hurricane season.

“More than 900 shelters have been inspected and are ready,” Mr. McKenzie informed, adding that “the Ministry of Labour [and Social Security] has adequate supplies”.

He further indicated that the ODPEM will continue its distribution of hurricane straps this year as part of ongoing preparedness efforts.

“The ODPEM initiated, last

year, a hurricane strap programme, and we are expecting this year to do the same by providing, through the Municipal Corporations, a couple thousand hurricane straps,” he said.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister, Dr. the Most Hon. Andrew Holness, is reminding the nation that preparedness is a shared responsibility.

“The Government is doing its part, but readiness must start at the household level. Every Jamaican must take steps now to prepare their homes, their farms, and their communities. Preparation saves lives. It protects property. It makes all the difference,” he stated in a release from the Office of the Prime Minister.

Dr. Holness also urges stakeholders in the agricultural and coastal sectors to take all necessary precautions to safeguard their livelihoods.

“Our farmers and fisherfolk are among the most vulnerable, and we urge you to secure equipment, livestock, vessels and store supplies in a safe and waterproof manner. Stay in touch with the Rural Agricultural Development Authority (RADA) and the ODPEM for updated guidance,” he said.

The public is strongly encouraged to monitor official advisories and updates from the ODPEM and the Meteorological Service of Jamaica, and to remain vigilant against misinformation.



The National Works Agency (NWA) team using heavy equipment to clear the Sandy Gully in the vicinity of Spanish Town Road in Kingston. The Government has allocated \$2 billion to undertake comprehensive gully works.



Minister of Local Government and Community Development, Hon. Desmond McKenzie (second right, back row), and Member of Parliament for Clarendon South Eastern, Hon. Parnel Charles Jr. (right, back row), with some of the residents who received hurricane roof straps. Also with the residents (from left) are Councillor Winston Maragh; Acting Director General, ODPEM, Richard Thompson and Mayor of May Pen, Councillor Joel Williams.