

At least 28 dead as storm Julia dumps heavy rains in Central America



Residents clean a road after a mudslide in San Salvador, El Salvador. [Jose Cabezas/Reuters]

Managua, October 11 (RHC)-- At least 28 people have died after Hurricane Julia caused rains and landslides in several Latin American countries, including Guatemala and El Salvador.

Guatemala's disaster prevention agency said five people died after a hillside collapsed on their house in Alta Verapaz province, burying them. And in Huehuetenango province, near Mexico, nine people died, including a soldier involved in rescue work.

Authorities in El Salvador said five Salvadoran army soldiers died after a wall collapsed at a house where they sought refuge in the town of Comasagua, where hundreds of police and soldiers have been conducting anti-gang raids. Another soldier was injured.

Two other people died in the eastern El Salvador town of Guatajiagua after heavy rains caused a wall of their home to collapse. Another man in El Salvador died when he was swept away by a current, and another died when a tree fell on him.

Rivers overflowed their banks and El Salvador declared a state of emergency and opened 80 storm shelters.

In neighbouring Honduras, a 22-year-old woman died when she was swept away by currents, and three people died when their boat swamped or capsized in northern Honduras. A man in Nicaragua was killed by a falling tree.

Julia hit Nicaragua's central Caribbean coast early on Sunday as a hurricane with maximum sustained winds of 135kmph (85 mph) and survived the passage over the country's mountainous terrain, entering the Pacific late in the day as a tropical storm.

By Monday, Julia had moved inland over Guatemala and its wind speed was down to 50kmph (30mph).

The U.S. National Hurricane Center (NHC) said Julia was centred about 130km (80 miles) west-northwest of Guatemala City, and was moving west-northwest at 24 kmph (15 mph).

NHC said floods and mudslides were possible across Central America and southern Mexico through Tuesday, with the storm expected to bring as much as 380 mm (15 inches) of rain in isolated areas.

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