

Julia brings torrential rains and floods to Central America

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Managua, October 10 (RHC)-- Former Hurricane Julia has drenched the Central American nations of Guatemala and El Salvador with heavy rain, forcing authorities to evacuate hundreds of residents and set up emergency shelters.

Julia has been downgraded to a tropical depression, bringing wind speeds of 60 kilometres per hour (35 miles per hour) to Guatemala on Monday, down from 140 kph (85 mph) when the storm hit the Caribbean coast of Nicaragua as a hurricane a day earlier.

While the storm has started to ease and is expected to dissipate later on Monday, authorities warn that dangerous conditions could persist. "Life-threatening flash floods and mudslides should continue from Julia across Central American and Southern Mexico through Tuesday," the U.S. National Hurricane Center (NHC) said in an advisory on Monday. The Miami-based NHC also said that 5-10 inches (12.7-25.4cm) of rainfall was possible in El Salvador and southern Guatemala.

Guatemala declared a 30-day state of emergency on Monday to help authorities "implement urgent measures to safeguard the lives of Guatemalans", President Alejandro Giammattei said on Twitter. Julia has killed at least 14 people so far, authorities said, with El Salvador reporting the deaths of nine people as of Monday morning, including five soldiers.

In Honduras, five victims have been confirmed, including a 22-year-old woman who died on Sunday after she was swept away by flood waters, and a young woman and a four-year-old boy in a boat that capsized near the Nicaragua border on Saturday night, officials said.

Honduran authorities said 9,200 people had sought refuge in shelters. Nicaraguan authorities said 9,500 people have been placed in storm shelters while 1,300 others were forced to flee their homes in Guatemala, where two people are missing and two have been hospitalised.

About one million people in Nicaragua's coastal region lost power due to damaged land lines and a decision by the government to cut electricity for safety reasons.

Heavy rains and evacuations also have been reported in Panama, Honduras and Costa Rica, where some roads have been closed due to the heavy rain. Julia is the latest storm to bring flooding, destruction, and deaths to the Americas region.

Hurricane Ian prompted widespread power outages in Cuba before gaining strength and slamming into Florida in late September, killing more than 80 people and inundating swathes of the US state with torrential waters.

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