

Cuba in disaster mode: first Hurricane Rafael, now two earthquakes



An electricity worker in Havana's Vedado district (source: Commons)

After Hurricane Rafael caused severe destruction in western Cuba last Wednesday with wind speeds of up to 185 kilometers per hour, reconstruction work is in full swing. On Sunday, the next blow followed, when two strong earthquakes measuring 6 on the Richter scale shook the east of the island.

Rafael, which reached 3 on the Saffir-Simpson scale out of 5, paralyzed Cuba's power grid for the second time in a few weeks. The heavy winds destroyed a main line between Havana and Artemisa and caused extensive damage. According to a report by the Cuban civil defense, more than 2,000 buildings have been affected nationwide. In Havana alone, 654 buildings were damaged and 28 completely destroyed. Over 400 power poles were knocked over and dozens of trees uprooted. In the western provinces, there was severe damage to agriculture. Several thousand hectares of arable land and various fattening farms were devastated.

Due to timely preparations, in the course of which 98,000 people were brought to safety by the civil defense, there were no fatalities. According to the latest information, no one was killed as a result of the earthquakes either, but several people were injured.

The power grid was restored early Saturday morning, almost three days after the blackout. In Havana, 95 percent of customers now have electricity again. In Artemisa and Pinar del Río, however, more than 90 percent of households are still in the dark due to local damage. Local protests broke out in several provinces. The water supply has also not yet been restored in many places, which is why tankers are being used. Central and eastern Cuban provinces sent brigades of electricians to the west to support the work there.

The hurricane was followed by earthquakes. The first quake occurred on Sunday morning at 10:50 a.m. local time and was felt in the provinces of Santiago de Cuba, Guantánamo, Granma, Holguín, and Ciego de Ávila. The epicenter was in the Caribbean Sea, about 48 kilometers southeast of the city of Pílon in the province of Granma. The second quake, measuring 6.7 on the Richter scale, occurred at 11:49 a.m. "There were landslides, damage to houses and power lines. We ask the population in these regions to stay in open areas. We will start assessing the damage and repair work. The first priority is to save human lives," Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel wrote shortly afterwards on X.

According to initial reports, the two earthquakes, which were followed by several aftershocks, caused damage mainly in the province of Granma. In Pílon, 200 buildings were damaged and three collapsed. Lighthouses, radars, and transmission masts in the region were also affected.

Several countries and the United Nations announced their support in the wake of the disaster. Venezuela sent a ship with 300 tons of relief supplies. Russia announced that it would provide an emergency loan of 60 million US dollars for the purchase of fuel. On Sunday, the EU sent an aircraft with relief supplies together with the United Nations. Mexico, Colombia, Bolivia, and China also announced that they would be sending aid.

On Monday, schools were able to reopen across the country.

Rafael was the second hurricane to hit Cuba this year. At the end of October, Category 1 Hurricane Oscar caused devastation and eight deaths in the eastern province of Guantánamo amid a nationwide blackout. ([Cubaheute](#))