

Hurricane Ivan blasts Caribbean

A powerful hurricane has swept through the south-eastern Caribbean islands, killing at least 15 people and gaining strength as it heads towards Jamaica.

Hurricane Ivan is now travelling at 160mph (258km/h), making it a category five storm, the highest on the scale.

It has left scenes of devastation in the small island of Grenada where at least 12 people were killed.

Jamaica is expected to take a direct hit on Friday, with the hurricane reaching western Cuba at the weekend.

It is thought to be the worst hurricane to hit the Caribbean in a decade.

Grenada's Prime Minister, Keith Mitchell, whose official residence was destroyed, told the BBC the island was "90% devastated" and that he had declared a national disaster.

The capital St George's was hit by 125mph (200km/h) winds, flattening homes and disrupting power. The storm destroyed the city's emergency operations centre, the main prison, many schools, and damaged the main hospital.



Mr Mitchell, who is now aboard a British naval patrol ship HMS Richmond, said the hurricane had caused "hundreds of millions of dollars of damage".

He said the country's key export crop, nutmeg, was likely to have "taken a tremendous hit".

There are conflicting reports of the total death toll from the storm, with the US State Department putting the number of dead at 20.

Authorities in Grenada have confirmed 12 deaths. Elsewhere, a pregnant woman was killed in Tobago, an elderly woman died in Barbados and one person was killed on the Venezuelan coast.

Direct hit

Most of the damage was inflicted on Grenada on Tuesday, but downed communications meant it has taken time for the news to filter out.

The BBC Caribbean service's reporter in St George's, Michael Bascombe, said the hurricane was the worst in living memory - worse than Hurricane Janet, which wrecked the island in 1955.

Several inmates escaped from the island's 17th Century prison during the storm. They are

believed to include some of the politicians involved in the left-wing coup that prompted the US to invade Grenada in 1983.

Looting is reported to be widespread. American students in St George's University told the Associated Press news agency they felt unsafe and had armed themselves against looters with knives, sticks and pepper spray.

A United Nations disaster team is reported to be on its way to the island.

Before hitting Grenada, the hurricane brought down trees and power lines and blew off roofs in Barbados and Tobago.

Storm warnings had also been issued for the Dutch islands of Aruba, Bonaire and Curacao, but reports now suggest the islands have largely been spared.

The hurricane is projected to hit Florida on Monday. It would be the third major storm to strike the US state this summer.

PREDICTED PATH OF HURRICANE IVAN

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