

Unprecedented Devastation: Hurricane Melissa Leaves Western Jamaica in Crisis

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An aerial shot the island of Jamaica, reshaped from paradise to devastation. Aerial shot off the island of Jamaica after the catastrophic landfall of Category 5 Hurricane Melissa on Tuesday, October 28, 2025. Photo by: Joemar Sombero.

Days after Category 5 Hurricane Melissa struck Jamaica, residents in western parishes remain cut off, struggling for food, water, and shelter, while electricity, communications, and government relief continue to lag.

Entire communities in Westmoreland, St. Elizabeth, Hanover, and parts of Trelawny and St. James are isolated. Homes are destroyed, roads blocked by uprooted trees and mudslides, and most residents are left with only the clothes on their backs. “I haven’t seen anything like this in my entire life - the rivers run ova, me house flat-flat, and we cyah leave,” said Lorne, 54, a resident of Petersfield, Westmoreland.

Meteorologist and historians say Melissa’s destruction rivals’ hurricanes that hit Jamaica decades ago, including the 1988 Hurricane Gilbert. Once lush hillsides are stripped bare, leafy green trees uprooted, farmland buried in the mud, rivers swollen and contaminated. “The mountains look like a moonscape,” said Dr. Rose-Ann Smith a local environmental researcher. Several historical landmarks, including the oldest Anglican Church on Black River and Thomas Manning Building

in Westmoreland, have suffered significant damage or complete destruction. Popular tourist areas, such as Treasure Beach and Alhambra in St. Elizabeth, as well as the Pepper Shrimp area in St. Thomas, have also been severely affected, with roads washed out and structures flattened by floodwaters, due to significant damage or complete destruction.

Residents report contaminated water and little access to food. People are washing clothes in stagnant floodwater and struggling to stay nourished. Looting has been reported in some isolated areas as desperation grows. Volunteers and private donors have been delivering food, bottled water, and clothing where they can. “The government help nuh reach we yet, but we still a get likkle food from some people who come in and help,” said Franco Jefferson of St. Elizabeth.

The Office of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management (ODPEM) acknowledge that blocked roads, fuel shortages, and severe infrastructure damage have slowed government relief. “Our teams are working around the clock, but access remains extremely limited,” said Robert Morgan, Minister without Portfolio in the Ministry of Economic Growth and Infrastructure Development. International aid agencies have arrived, providing emergency supplies and coordinating with local volunteers to reach marooned communities.

Opposition officials have called for faster, more transparent government relief,” said Mark Golding. Meanwhile, volunteer groups such as Major Jamaica Hurricane Relief 2025, founded by Romeich Major, have stepped in the hardest - hit parishes. He continues feeding residents and distributing essentials.

Hurricane Melissa made landfall on Tuesday, October 28, 2025 as a Category 5 storm with exceeding 185 mph (295 km/h), destroying homes and infrastructure across at least five parishes, including St. Elizabeth, Westmoreland, Hanover, St. James, and Manchester, with many communities in western Jamaica. Unlike previous storms, Melissa’s scale and intensity have left many communities completely inaccessible, with no electricity, water, or communications for days. This has prompted comparisons to Hurricane Gilbert in 1988 and Ivan in 2004, though locals describe Melissa as “worse than anything we’ve ever experienced.”

As some supplies slowly reach distribution centers, volunteers pledge to continue relief efforts. “It’s been a week since the passage of Hurricane Melissa and number of persons and organizations have come together to assist those in dire need which is the most awesome thing to see and be a part of”, said Chinel Lee. Residents hope that official relief will soon reach the hardest-hit areas, but for now, survival depends on community solidarity.