

Epic Floods Batter Colombia



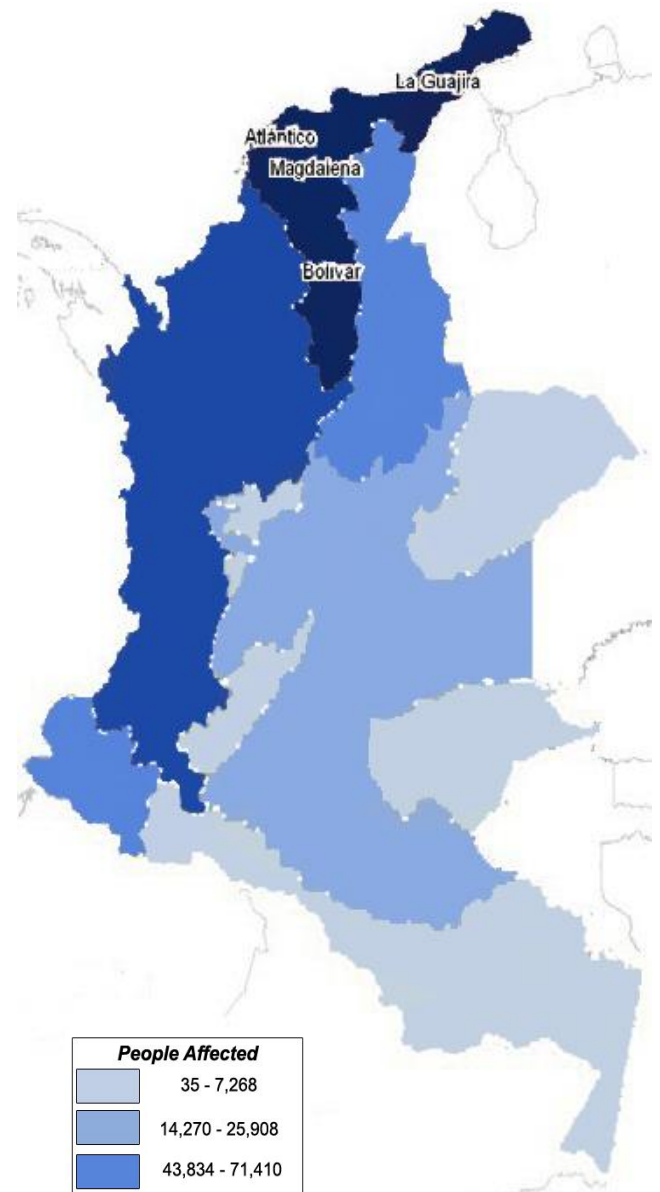
A National Emergency

“The damage is incalculable.”

Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos

At the beginning of January, the United Nations reports that more than 2.2 million people have been affected by the massive floods now devastating Colombia. The floodwaters and relentless rains have caused massive landslides that have:

- Killed 311, with 64 missing.
- Injured 289.
- Displaced at least 130,500 people now in shelters.
- Destroyed 5,323 houses.
- Damaged 328,420 homes.
- Damaged nearly 20,000 miles of paved roads.
- Damaged 815 schools; with over 300,000 students unable to attend class.
- Submerged 272,000 acres of planted cropland, and damaged 210,000 additional acres.
- Destroyed 496,000 tons of crops and killed over 70,000 cattle.
- Impacted 28 of Colombia’s 32 departments (states).



With the “La Niña” weather phenomenon predicted to continue bringing record rainfall to the country for months to come, with more flash flooding and landslides expected.

The Response

Colombia's Government has mobilized an unprecedented response to a growing humanitarian crisis.

Shelter: An estimated 330 shelters are in operation throughout the country, housing more than 102,000 people. The nation's Social Action program is providing subsidies that will reach 2.1 million people and cost more than \$235 million. The program will also provide "priority payments" of \$450 for three months to an estimated 17,000 families in dire need, to provide shelter, food and hygiene kits.

Water and Sanitation: In the state of Atlántico, one of the regions most impacted by the floods, much of the population has little to no access to safe drinking water. Due to the lack of functioning sewage systems, sanitation in those areas is of grave concern. The government is distributing water in 15,000-liter tank trucks to homes and shelters and is deploying 15 mobile water treatment plants.

Food and Nutrition: The state of Chocó, another of the worst affected areas, has a significant Afro-Colombian and indigenous population that relies largely on farming. The continual rains have submerged crops and made replanting nearly impossible, which has paralyzed food production in that region of country.



The Government, as of December 21, had provided \$10.2 million in food assistance to residents of Chocó and other affected states.

To date, the Government of Colombia has committed more than \$475 million to flood relief, through the "National Calamity Fund." The national "Humanitarian Colombia" campaign has collected \$26.4 million. The Inter-American Development Bank has pledged \$350 million in humanitarian assistance. The Colombian Red Cross has funded and delivered over 1,300 tons of aid to nearly 400,000 people.

To protect public safety, the Government recently announced two new decrees under the current state of economic, social and ecological emergency. The first one empowers mayors and governors to evict people who refuse to evacuate areas affected or at risk. The second allows the use of seized machinery (from illegal mining enterprises) for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of roads, rivers and canals.

As Colombia struggles to cope with the day-to-day emergencies caused by the epic flooding, the long-term economic costs for full recovery are staggering.

In addition to the rebuilding of homes, businesses, schools, hospitals and roads – the country faces the need for massive new infrastructure projects to control floodwaters in the future.

An Emergency National Wealth Tax

To help pay for the relief effort, Colombia has taken the extraordinary measure of implementing a “wealth tax.”

The wealth tax has only been imposed in the past to fund anti-insurgency efforts. The new tax will enable additional direct aid and funds for rehabilitation of destroyed infrastructure.

Additional Resources

- **Colombia Humanitaria:**
<http://wsp.presidencia.gov.co/ColombiaHumanitaria/prensa/Paginas/ColombiaHumanitariaEnglis h.aspx>
- **CNN Video: “Colombia’s Worst Weather Ever,” 12/20/10:**
<http://www.cnn.com/video/data/2.0/video/international/2010/12/20/wv.colombia.worst.flooding.cnn.html>
- **CNN Video: “Flooding Wipes Out Towns in Colombia,” 12/8/10:**
<http://www.cnn.com/video/#/video/world/2010/12/08/vo.colombia.flooding.caracoltv?iref=allsearch>
- **UN Situation Report, 1/11/11:**
http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/retrieveattachments?openagent&shortid=VDUX-8CZW55&file=Full_Report.pdf