

IDRL Emergency Fact Sheet

JAMAICA

Update November 4, 2025

This International Disaster Response Law (IDRL) Emergency Fact Sheet is intended to provide key information to international humanitarian actors, including the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement operations and network, relating to the regulatory and policy environment applying to the entry of incoming disaster relief.

This document provides an IDRL Snapshot of Jamaica, followed by information on the recent disaster context as well as more detailed information on key issues related to international disaster assistance.

Visit the IFRC Disaster Law website: <https://disasterlaw.ifrc.org/> to know more about our work on IDRL.

Disclaimer:

- This update was produced on November 4, 2025, and does not take into account changes in circumstances beyond that date.*
 - Where documents were not available online, information was taken from secondary sources.*
-

IDRL Snapshot for Jamaica

	Issue	Status	Comment
1.	Legal framework for IDRL	Partial	The DRM Act 2015 refers to procedures for cooperation with international organisations and foreign governments. The National Disaster Relief Policy and the Relief Clearance Policy provides more detailed procedures on receiving assistance from overseas.
2.	Focal point for coordination	✓	ODPEM is identified in the National Disaster Relief Policy as a focal point for coordinating with foreign missions.
3.	Roles and responsibilities of key actors relating to international disaster assistance outlined	Partial	Roles of some key actors such as the Director-General of ODPEM are outlined in the DRM Act. Some responsibilities specifically related to international assistance are outlined in the National

			Disaster Relief Policy although not comprehensively.
4.	Process for requesting, welcoming, terminating assistance	Partial	Some procedures are outlined in the National Disaster Relief Policy, but not comprehensively.
5.	Legal facilities for international actors	Partial	ODPEM is entitled to seek waiver of duties from Ministry of Finance and provide authorisation/certification to other agencies for relief items being imported. See National Disaster Relief Policy.
6.	Quality standards for international actors	✗	
7.	Eligibility requirements for international actors to receive legal facilities	✗	
8.	Specialised unit for expediting assistance	✗	
9.	Provisions for transparency, safeguards and accountability mechanisms	✗	
10.	Procedures for the sending, transit, and re-exportation (unused goods, equipment) of international disaster assistance	✗	

Recent Disaster Impacts

- **(October 2025) Hurricane Melissa:** Category 5 Hurricane made landfall on Jamaica (October 28, 2025) as the strongest storm on record to hit Jamaica with sustained winds of up to 175mph (as of Monday October 27). Mandatory evacuations were issued for several vulnerable communities including Port Royal, Portland Cottage, Old Harbour Bay, among others.¹ The hurricane caused widespread destruction across the country with the hardest hit areas being the parishes in the west of Jamaica including the communities of Black River and Montego Bay. Approximately 6,000 persons remain in shelters across the island, with 881 shelters open to facilitate persons during and after the passage of the hurricane.² As at November 3, the death toll stands at 32.³
- **(2024) Hurricane Beryl:** Category 5 Hurricane which passed south of the island as a Category 4 storm, flooding roads, damaging buildings including Kingston's Normal Manley International

¹ Office of the Prime Minister, 'Mandatory Evacuation Order for Specified Vulnerable Communities', October 26, 2025, available at < <https://opm.gov.jm/mandatory-evacuation-order-for-specified-vulnerable-communities/> >

² Jamaica Information Service, '6000 persons in 382 shelters', October 28, 2025, available at < <https://jis.gov.jm/6000-persons-in-382-shelters/> >

³ Jamaica Information Service, 'Official death toll from Hurricane Melissa, now 32', November 3, 2025, accessed at, <https://jis.gov.jm/official-death-toll-from-hurricane-melissa-now-32/>

Airport and killing two people. The hurricane affected approximately 160,000 people, displacing 1,876 and severely damaging infrastructure, homes, and essential services. The storm disrupted access to clean water, electricity, and healthcare, with agricultural and fishing communities suffering significant losses.⁴

Preparedness Actions

- **Hurricane Melissa:**
 - **Declaration of disaster area:** The Prime Minister of Jamaica declared the whole of Jamaica a disaster area on October 24, 2025. See **THE DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT (DECLARATION OF THREATENED AREA) (TROPICAL STORM MELISSA) ORDER, 2025:** <https://opm.gov.jm/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Disaster-Risk-Mngt-Act.pdf>
 -
 - **Mandatory evacuations:** In keeping with powers under section 26(2)(c) of the Disaster Risk Management Act, Prime Minister Holness has issued the **Disaster Risk Management (Hurricane Melissa) Evacuation Order, 2025:** <https://opm.gov.jm/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/drma .pdf>
Mandatory evacuations in effect for:
 - Port Royal, Kingston
 - Portland Cottage, Clarendon
 - Rocky Point, Clarendon
 - Old Harbour Bay, St. Catherine
 - Taylor Land, Bull Bay, St. Andrew
 - New Haven, St. Andrew
 - Riverton City, St. Andrew
 - **Trade:** To prevent price gouging before the passage of Hurricane Melissa, the Minister responsible for trade issued an order prohibiting businesses from increasing their prices on necessary goods on October 24, 2025. See the **Trade, (Sale of goods during the period of declaration of the threatened area) (Tropical Storm Melissa) Order, 2025:** <https://opm.gov.jm/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/The-Trade-Act.pdf>

Legal and Institutional Framework

- Government authority for managing disasters in Jamaica is the **Office of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management (ODPEM).**
- The legislation governing disaster management, and which established NEMO is the **Disaster Risk Management Act, 2015:** <https://www.odpem.org.jm/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/DRM-Act-2015.pdf>
- The DRM Act provides for:
 - S. 14 Exemption of customs duty, general consumption tax for ODPEM regarding any article imported into Jamaica for use in performance of its functions.

⁴ IFRC, Initial Assessment Report: Hurricane Beryl: Jamaica, 19 August 2024, available at <
<https://reliefweb.int/report/jamaica/ifrc-initial-assessment-report-hurricane-beryl-jamaica-19-august-2024>>

- S. 16 Establishment of a National Disaster Risk Management Council.
 - S. 17 Preparation of a National Disaster Response Coordination Plan which includes procedures for cooperation with international organisations and foreign governments.
 - S. 26 Gives the Prime Minister the power to declare a disaster area or threatened area.
 - See Disaster Risk Management (Declaration Of Disaster Area) (Hurricane Beryl) Order, 2024
 - S. 26(6) Where Prime Minister has declared the whole or any part of Jamaica a disaster area, the Director General of ODPEM or persons authorised by him have the power to enter any premises (with or without owner's consent) if necessary in the performance of his functions.
 - S. 27 – In relation to the declared area, the Director General may exercise certain powers, including controlling movement, ordering evacuation etc.
 - S. 37 – Establishment of a National Disaster Fund.
- There is a **National Disaster Action Plan** (<https://www.odpem.org.jm/national-legislation-plans-policies/>) for Jamaica available on ODPEM's website. The parts of the plan accessible include:
 - **Terms of Reference for Committees, Agencies and Individuals with Disaster Functions – Part 2**
https://www.odpem.org.jm/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/National_Disaster_Action_Plan_for_Jamaica_Part2.pdf
 - **National Emergency Operations Centre (Standard Operating Procedures) Part 4:**
https://www.odpem.org.jm/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/National_Disaster_Action_Plan_for_Jamaica_Part4.pdf
- There is a **National Damage Assessment Plan (2001):**
https://www.odpem.org.jm/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/National_Damage_Assessment_Plan_for_Jamaica.pdf
 - This is a sub-plan of the National Disaster Plan, which outlines the process for inspecting and investing the damage of either a specific facility and/or a particular area, to aid disaster managers in deciding on the type and amount of assistance required to restore a sense of normality to the affected area. The result of this inspection is to be recorded and assessed at the National and/or Parish levels by the appropriate agencies.
- There is a **National Disaster Relief Policy:**
<https://www.odpem.org.jm/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/National-Disaster-Relief-Policy.pdf>

This policy outlines:

 - Agencies and their roles in dispensing assistance to victims.
 - Red Cross as one of the distributors of relief.
 - Disaster Relief Policy flow chart
 - Procedures for dispensing relief
 - Emergency Shelter/Welfare Action Plan
 - **Relief Clearance Policy →** procedures for receiving assistance normally from overseas, for persons displaced by emergencies or disasters. See p. 22-26.
<https://www.odpem.org.jm/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/National-Disaster-Relief-Policy.pdf>
- There is a **National Emergency Relief Clearance Plan (2021).***

<https://www.odpem.org.jm/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/National-Emergency-Relief-Clearance-Plan-Pocket-Version.pdf>

This plan outlines procedures for post-disaster clearing of personnel, equipment and supplies at ports of entry. It includes information on:

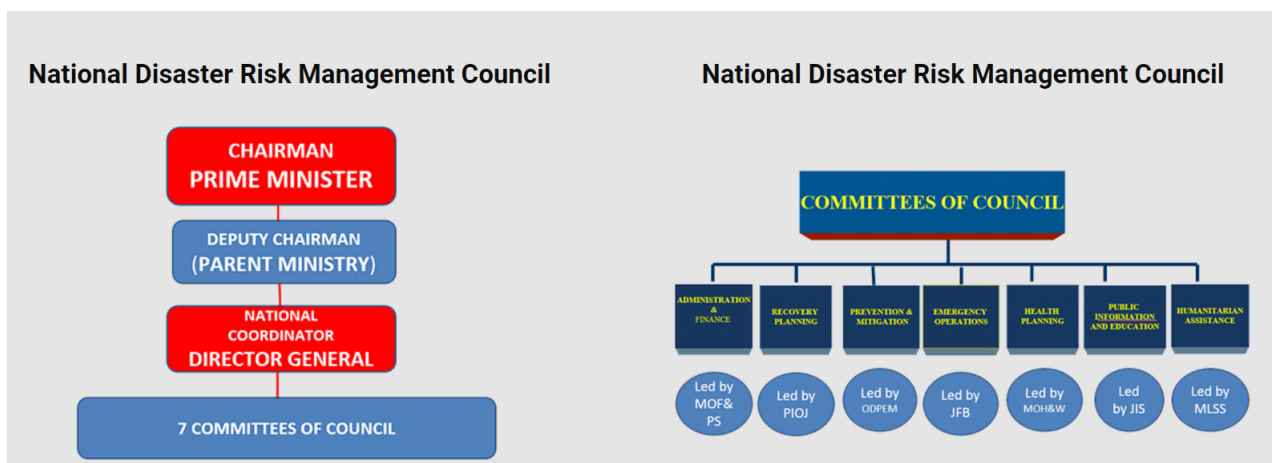
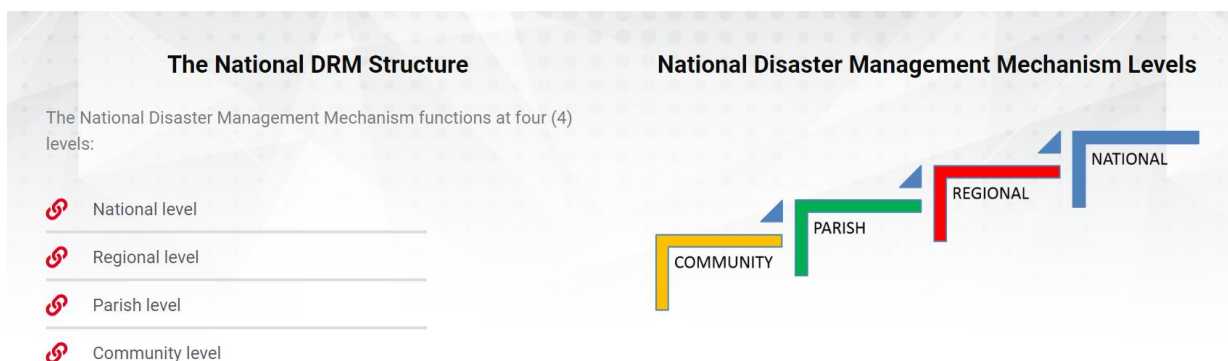
- Approved ports of entry for emergency relief.
- Institutional framework for relief clearance (including guidelines for donations of relief items from assisting states and organisations.
- One-Stop Shop for emergency relief clearance
- Roles of entities in relief clearance and governing legal/policy instruments/ frameworks
- Standard Operating procedures for the clearance of relief
- Guidelines for exemptions for charitable organisations.

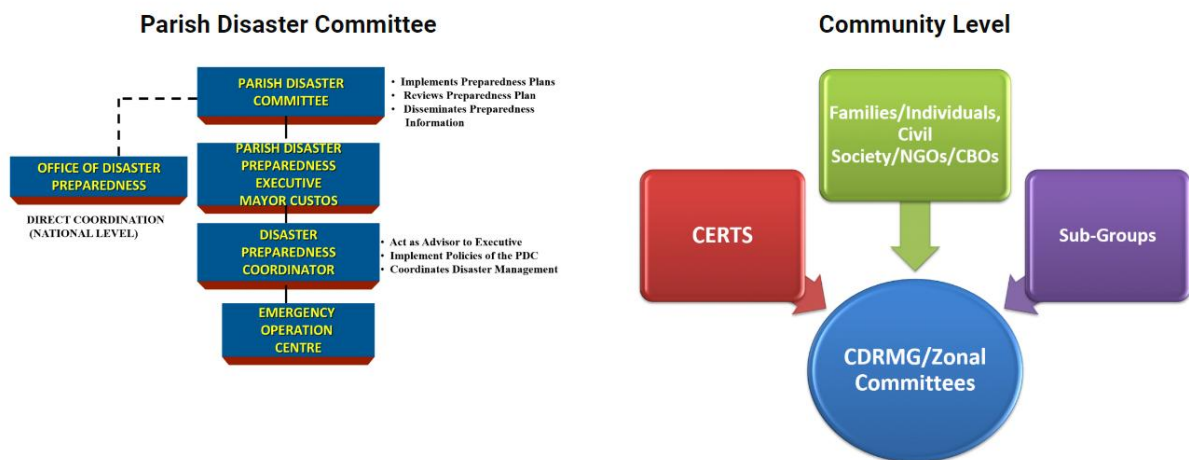
NB. Under this plan, the Jamaica Red Cross and IFRC qualify for exemptions. However, the activation of the exemption waiver will be based on whether the Ministry of Finance announces its activation.

***The National Emergency Relief Clearance Plan (2021), although available through a Google Search, however it is not readily available on ODPEM's website. Therefore, it is not clear whether this plan is currently enforced or approved.**

The Relief Clearance Policy under the National Disaster Relief Policy is what is currently posted on ODPEM's website.

Disaster Management Structure





(Taken from ODPEM's website: <https://www.odpem.org.jm/disaster-risk-management-structure>)

NB. The Government has announced that it will be reviewing its disaster preparedness and response framework in light of the destruction of Hurricane Melissa. See: <https://jis.gov.jm/govt-to-review-and-restructure-jamaicas-disaster-preparedness-framework/>

Recommendation: This is an opportunity to provide technical support through the Jamaica Red Cross to review its Disaster Risk Management Act, 2015 along with supporting regulations and protocols for anticipatory action and IDRL.

Entry of Foreign Humanitarian Personnel

- **Hurricane Melissa:**
 - The Norman Manley International Airport in Kingston could begin to accommodate emergency relief flights as early as **Thursday (October 30)**.
 - Sangster International Airport (TBD)
 - Montego Bay (TBD)
 - Ian Flemming International Airport (certain flights)
- There are no special visas – or visa arrangements – for disaster relief personnel.
- Entry visas are not required from citizens of the Caribbean, most Commonwealth countries, USA, or most Western European countries. Personnel from these countries may enter Jamaica for short periods without prior application. Visits will typically be approved for a 30-day period, and the cumulative number of visits should not exceed 180 days in a calendar year.
- To see the full regime of visa requirements for entry into Jamaica see the **Passport, Immigration and Citizenship Agency website:** <https://www.pica.gov.jm/immigration/entry-visa-requirements>
- For longer visits, a work permit or work permit exemption will be needed from the Ministry of Labour.

Requirements for International Actors

No clear provisions explicitly provided for:

- Registration of international actors
- Determining eligibility of international actors to qualify for legal facilities
- Monitoring international actors to ensure compliance with minimum standards or obligations and guidance set out by the Government.

IFRC Legal Status

- IFRC has an active Legal Status Agreement in Jamaica (signed 1994) that provides IFRC with certain rights and privileges including:
 - Freedom to transfer funds, currency from one country to another and to convert currency into another.
 - Exempt from all direct taxes.
 - Exemptions from customs duties and prohibitions and restrictions on imports and exports in respect of articles directly imported or exported for its official use, for relief and development activities and for publications.

Customs duties and tax waivers

• **Hurricane Melisa: Waiver of Duties, Taxes and Fees**

- Once properly consigned to ODPEM and upon Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade (MFAFT)'s receipt of the Donor Certification, the Minister of Finance will expedite the waiver of all duties, taxes and charges, including, inter alia, the Environmental Levee, the Customs Administration Fee, and any other applicable border charges. Donors must ensure ODPEM is named as consignee of record; otherwise, duty relief cannot be guaranteed.

○ **NEW: Clarification on customs relief measures**

Approval granted by the Ministry of Finance to Jamaica Customs Agency (JCA) to apply relief on import duty and general consumption tax on imported relief supplies and donations to assist in recovery efforts. This relief applies to goods consigned to ODPEM as well as relief supplies consigned to private individuals or institutions. Effective from October 29 – November 28, 2025). See full details: <https://jis.gov.jm/clarification-on-customs-relief-measures-for-hurricane-melissa-recovery/>

- **NOTE:** Jamaica Red Cross does not currently benefit from the tax waivers under the Charities Act. It usually received assistance from ODPEM to have its goods cleared. Since 2022, Jamaica Red Cross has been working on revising its Jamaica Red Cross Society Act, to address this issue. ***After Hurricane Beryl, relief items for the National Society were consigned to IFRC to benefit from the exemptions under the IFRC Legal Status Agreement.***

Entry of goods, relief

- **Hurricane Melissa:**
 - The Government has launched a website to mobilise support, channel relief and coordinate recovery efforts in the aftermath of Category Five Hurricane Melissa.
 - The Support Jamaica website, which is an online platform, can be accessed at supportjamaica.gov.jm
 - **The Government has provided specific guidelines for consignment, pre-shipment documentation, standards and labelling. See Appendix 1**
 - **The Government has issued a Preliminary Needs List as at October 27, 2025, subject to change as situation develops. This list includes needs related to Shelter, WASH, Debris Clearance and Tools, Health Supplies, Environmental Health, Agriculture and Livestock, Military Needs. See: <https://supportjamaica.gov.jm/needs>**

Entry of specialised equipment

- **Use of drones**

All professional operators (commercial and non-commercial) must apply to the *Jamaica Civil Aviation Authority (JCAA)* for a *Special Aerial Work Permit* before each flight. All entities or persons wishing to operate a UA, as referenced in this paragraph:

 - Shall apply to the **JCAA in writing** for approval, providing all details of the intended operation
 - Shall not fly the aircraft, unless written permission has been received from the Authority, stating any applicable restrictions or conditions.
 - Having received approval, **the professional operator must observe and comply with all the conditions included in the permit**, in order to exercise the authority provided to operate a UA.

See full details here: <https://www.jcaa.gov.jm/professional-commercial-non-commercial-operators/>

Other Legal Facilities

No clear provisions explicitly provided for:

- Expedited procedures for recognition of foreign professional qualifications.
- Freedom of movement for international actors to access a disaster-affected area during a disaster response.
- Safety and security of international actors.

Contact

For more information about this IDRL Emergency Factsheet, please contact:

Jessie Jordan

IFRC Disaster Law Officer for the Dutch and English-speaking Caribbean

jessie.jordan@ifrc.org