



The JCLE Monthly

JAMAICA

YOUR PARTNER FOR RELIABLE WORKERS

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jaclo.org



Photo: Minister of Labour and Social Security, Hon. Pearnel Charles Jr, captured distributing food items to residents in the aftermath of Hurricane Melissa.

Rebuilding After Melissa: Strength, Partnership, and a Global Jamaican Effort

Hurricane Melissa reshaped daily life for thousands of Jamaican families. Homes were damaged, farms were washed out, and workers abroad faced the emotional strain of trying to support loved ones while fulfilling their contracts overseas. In the middle of that disruption, one thing became clear. Jamaica is not facing this crisis alone. Across Canada, the United States, and the wider diaspora, employers, civic partners, and Jamaican Liaison Officers have moved quickly to mobilise relief. From coordinated donation drives in Southern Ontario, to employer-funded support in Atlantic Canada, to large-scale packing efforts in Washington, D.C., the response has been steady and genuine. Supplies are being shipped through ODPEM, welfare checks are underway, and targeted assistance is reaching families in the hardest-hit parishes.

This newsletter captures the work happening across these networks. It highlights the partnerships that continue to stand with Jamaica, the workers who remain resilient in a difficult moment, and the commitment of the JCLE and JLS teams who are helping families rebuild, restore stability, and recover with dignity.



Colette Roberts Risdien, CD
Permanent Secretary,
Jamaica Overseas Employment
Programmes

Did you know?

Hurricane Melissa made landfall in Jamaica on October 28, 2025 as a Category 5 hurricane — the first of that strength to hit the island in recorded history and one of the most powerful Atlantic storms ever recorded, with sustained winds of about 185 mph.

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DID YOU KNOW

From Vermont to Jamaica, a Sunrise After the Storm

Each year, thousands of Jamaicans participate in overseas agricultural employment, particularly in the United States and Canada. The programme, which predates modern labour agreements, has become one of Jamaica's most enduring migration systems, linking rural communities on both sides of the border through decades of shared work.



Photo: Jamaican farm workers pictured with Sunrise Farms owner Barney Hodges, Hon. Pearnel Charles Jr., and Colette Roberts Riden during the presentation of donated supplies in support of Jamaican workers.

The storm had already moved on when the response began to take shape, quietly and deliberately, far from Jamaica's shores. In Vermont, farmers, church groups, and long-time partners of Jamaican farm workers gathered supplies with a single purpose: to help families rebuild after the storm. Within weeks, a 40-foot container was filled with roofing materials, tools, bedding, generators, and food, then shipped south. It arrived in Jamaica only days later, ready for distribution.

At the centre of the effort was Barney Hodges, owner of Sunrise Orchards.

"My family has employed Jamaican workers since 1942," Mr. Hodges said. "Some of the men we are supporting today have worked on our farm since 1985 and 1986. Now their sons and nephews work alongside them."

About 35 Jamaican workers and their families received direct support, including food, relief supplies, tools, bedding, roofing, and other building materials in December.

"What you see in these bins is practical help," Mr. Hodges said. "Things that help families rebuild their homes and steady their lives after the storm."

The effort was powered by community fundraising in Vermont, which raised approximately US\$95,000, about J\$15 million. The funds were converted into materials selected for immediate impact, allowing families to repair homes, restore stability, and return to work. Each year, thousands of Jamaicans participate in overseas agricultural employment, particularly in the United States and Canada. The programme, which predates modern labour agreements, has become one of Jamaica's most enduring seasonal migration systems, linking rural communities on both sides of the ocean.

In this instance, the delivery and distribution of assistance were facilitated through coordination with the Government of Jamaica, led by the Ministry of Labour and Social Security and the JCLO. Government officials worked with partners to support logistics, coordination, and timely clearance, helping to ensure the supplies reached intended recipients without delay.

"The impact of our Jamaican people has inspired others to stand with us," said the Hon. Pearnell Charles Jr., Minister of Labour and Social Security. "What we are seeing here is the value of long-standing relationships built on trust." He also urged other employers who benefit from Jamaican labour to step forward, noting that recovery requires sustained commitment.

"This is a marathon, not a sprint," the Minister said. "We are calling on more of our overseas partners to follow this example and stand with these families as recovery continues."

Colette Roberts Riden, Permanent Secretary on Special Assignment with the Jamaica Overseas Employment Programmes, said the response demonstrates what is possible when labour systems are built with people at their centre.

"Our role goes beyond placement," she said. "It includes safeguarding workers and supporting families when they are most vulnerable. The networks built through these programmes allowed this support to move quickly and reach people where it matters most."

In Vermont, organisers say the response required little persuasion.

"These are people we know," said one supporter involved in the fundraising. "They harvest our crops. They are part of our lives. When the storm hit, helping them was instinctive."

As Jamaica continues its recovery, the container from Vermont offers a counterpoint to disaster narratives focused solely on loss. It tells a quieter story, rooted in continuity and shared responsibility.

It is the story of work done faithfully over generations, and returned, without fanfare, when it mattered most.

Embassy Teams, Diaspora Volunteers, and JCLO Unite in Washington Relief Drive for Jamaica

The Embassy of Jamaica in Washington, D.C., joined by volunteers, diaspora partners, and the JCLO organised a major relief initiative to support households affected by Hurricane Melissa. Hundreds of packages containing food, medical supplies, tarpaulins, and essential items were prepared for shipment to the hardest-hit parishes.

The effort transformed the multipurpose hall into a highly organised packing centre where volunteers sorted and labelled hundreds of boxes of essential supplies. Permanent Secretary Mrs. Colette Roberts Ridsen emphasised the importance of leading from the front.

“In moments like this, Jamaicans want to know that we stand with them—not only through policy, but through direct action. Every package prepared here represents reassurance for a family rebuilding after Melissa.”

The relief drive reflects a larger mobilisation across the United States, where employers and diaspora networks have contributed to both in-kind support and financial donations. Several employers have made direct contributions to the

National Disaster Relief Fund, while others in New York are preparing targeted donations for agricultural recovery. Minister Parnell Charles Jr highlighted the critical role of overseas partners. “Our diaspora is one of Jamaica’s greatest assets. Their solidarity during difficult times demonstrates the strength of our global community and the deep connection they continue to maintain with home.”

The supplies were shipped to Jamaica through ODPEM for coordinated distribution, ensuring they reach the most heavily impacted households.



Photo: From left: David Greaves, Karlene Brown (Liaison Officer), Permanent Secretary Colette Roberts Ridsen, and Devion Elliott pause for a photo while packing relief items at the Embassy of Jamaica in Washington, D.C.

Liaison Officers Deployed to Assist Jamaica's Post-Melissa Assessments and Relief Efforts

Liaison Officers from the Jamaican Liaison Service in Canada and the JCLC in the United States of America have returned to Jamaica to support national assessments following Hurricane Melissa. Their on-the-ground involvement assisted the verification process and enhanced the Ministry's ability to respond swiftly to affected households.



Photo: From left: David Greaves, Karlene Brown (Liaison Officer), Permanent Secretary Colette Roberts Risdén, and Devion Elliott pause for a photo while packing relief items at the Embassy of Jamaica in Washington, D.C.

As recovery efforts intensify across the island, Liaison Officers from the JLS and JCLC were deployed to Jamaica to support the Ministry's post-disaster assessment work. The teams worked across the parishes most affected by Melissa—conducting site visits, documenting losses, and verifying the needs of households.

Their presence added a critical layer of support to the national relief operation, especially for families whose primary earners are abroad. Officers ensured that the Ministry has accurate information on damages, allowing assistance to be prioritised for the most severely affected persons. Minister Parnell Charles Jr underscored the significance of this deployment.

“These officers understand the realities of our workers and their families. Their involvement strengthens our response, improves accuracy, and ensures our workers abroad know that their loved ones are being supported.”

Permanent Secretary Mrs. Colette Roberts Risdén highlighted

that the assessments reinforce the Ministry's commitment to worker welfare.

“This programme extends beyond recruitment and placement. It is about safeguarding the well-being of workers and their families. Having officers on the ground in Jamaica as a demonstration of the Government's commitment to our people who travel in the overseas employment programme, whether they are in Canada, the United States or at home in Jamaica.”

The officers' findings will guide the Ministry's relief interventions and help coordinate with ODPEM and other partners to ensure that support reaches affected families as quickly as possible.

JCLO Launched “The Story of Jamaica’s Resilience” at NCAE Labor Forum

The Jamaica Central Labour Organisation unveiled its digital campaign video, *The Story of Jamaica’s Resilience*, at the National Council of Agricultural Employers (NCAE) Annual Labor Forum. The campaign encouraged U.S. agricultural employers to expand opportunities for Jamaican workers while supporting ongoing relief efforts following Hurricane Melissa.

The Jamaica Central Labour Organisation (JCLO) debuted its major digital campaign, *The Story of Jamaica’s Resilience*, at the National Council of Agricultural Employers (NCAE) Annual Labor Forum, where the Minister of Labour and Social Security, Hon. Parnell Charles Jr., addressed industry leaders and partners. The campaign video highlighted the devastating impact of the Category 5 Hurricane Melissa, the extensive damage across Jamaica’s agricultural regions, and the nation’s determined and ongoing recovery efforts. It documented the human cost of the disaster while underscoring the resilience of affected families and communities.

Designed as both an appeal and an invitation, the campaign showcased the strength of Jamaica’s workforce, the perseverance of families rebuilding after the hurricane, and the enduring partnership between Jamaican workers and U.S. agricultural employers. It encouraged employers to continue hiring Jamaican workers through the Overseas Employment Programme while contributing to relief and reconstruction initiatives that supported

workers’ households. Minister Charles underscored the campaign’s relevance during the Forum, noting: “Our workers have powered America’s agricultural industry for generations. After Hurricane Melissa, many of their families were rebuilding from severe loss. This campaign invited employers to deepen their partnership with Jamaica by expanding opportunities and supporting relief efforts that restored stability to the communities these workers call home.”

The video blended documentary-style storytelling with footage of storm damage, community recovery, and personal testimonies reflecting the determination of Jamaican families. It reinforced the theme of empowerment through employment, highlighting how overseas work provided income, dignity, stability, and a pathway for families to rebuild stronger.

Permanent Secretary Mrs. Colette Roberts Ridsden noted that the campaign aligned with the JCLO’s broader mission:

“The programme has always been about creating avenues for empowerment. This campaign showed the human side of the labour partnership and reminded employers that every opportunity offered helped rebuild a life, a home, or a future.”

Following its launch, the digital campaign was shared across JCLO platforms and with U.S. employers attending the NCAE Forum. It also directed viewers to verified relief channels supporting families affected by Hurricane Melissa.

By framing employment as both an economic and humanitarian partnership, *The Story of Jamaica’s Resilience* positioned the Overseas Employment Programme as a driver of national recovery, demonstrating how agricultural employers could play a meaningful role in supporting Jamaica’s rebuilding efforts.



Photo: Screen capture from *The Story of Jamaica’s Resilience* video, featuring Minister Parnell Charles Jr delivering remarks.

**We want to
hear from you!**

The Jamaica Central Labour Organisation (JCLO)

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