



MEDIA RELEASE

16 March 2018

Severe Tropical Storm “Eliakim” lashes Madagascar; heavy rain and flooding expected.

Welcome rain expected in South Africa this weekend due to a cold front.

Severe Tropical Storm Eliakim is currently about to make landfall along the north-eastern coastline of Madagascar, bringing strong damaging winds, torrential rainfall and very rough sea conditions to much of eastern Madagascar this weekend. Rainfall is likely to be dramatically enhanced by the mountainous topography of the country, with a significant risk of landslides, mudslides and general flooding adding to the overall risk and vulnerability of the inhabitants of Africa’s largest island.

Eliakim is forecast to stay well away from South African shores. However, a cold front (not related to the tropical storm at all) is currently advancing across South Africa, with colder, moist air expected to bring cold conditions and some welcome rain to the eastern interior (including the Highveld region) on Saturday. A rapid countrywide recovery of temperature, together with drier conditions is anticipated as early as Monday. (See satellite image in Figure 1 below).

Severe Tropical Storm Eliakim is the fifth such system to develop in the South West Indian ocean region this summer. Whilst Eliakim is not making landfall over Madagascar as a fully-fledged Tropical Cyclone, Eliakim nevertheless has great potential to cause significant damage to infrastructure, mainly as a result of a combination of torrential rain as well as strong winds of the order of 89 to 118 km/h. In terms of impacts on this largely impoverished island state, the risk of wash-aways, landslides and localised flooding will be magnified by the generally patchy infrastructure of narrow roads and few bridges. The risk of isolated communities becoming cut off by rising floodwaters is therefore a distinct hazard. Flying debris, especially in coastal communities in the towns of Ambalabe and Ambohitralanana (located in north-eastern Madagascar) is also a significant safety hazard and inhabitants would be well-advised to seek shelter in well-constructed buildings. Moreover, inhabitants of coastal communities should be aware of the risk of storm surge, as local

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sea level will typically rise about 1 to 2 metres, over and above local tide action, along most of the eastern seaboard of Madagascar.

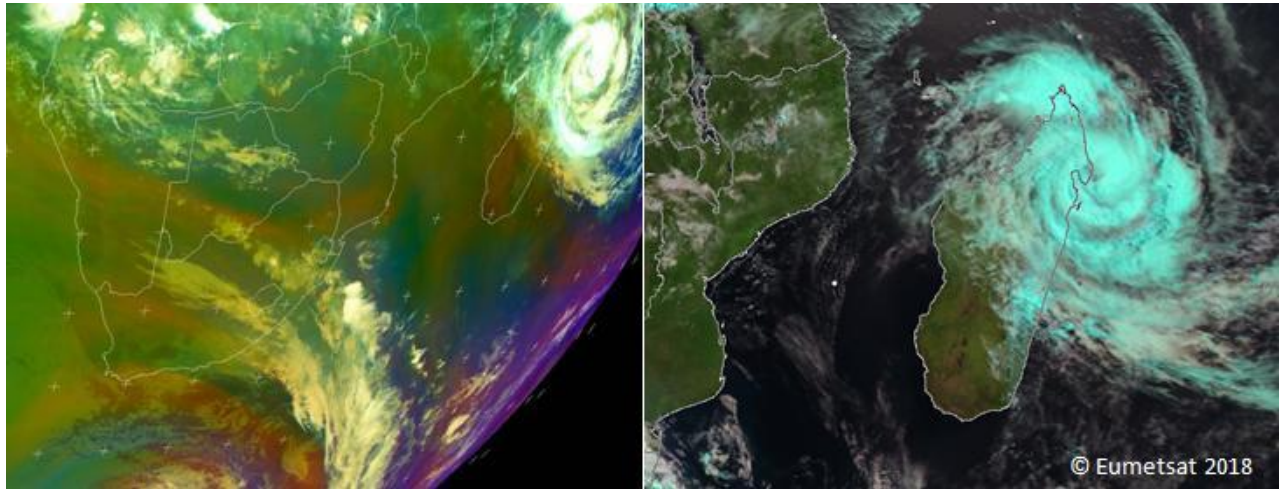


Figure 1: Meteosat RGB satellite image at 08h00SAST this morning, Friday 16 March 2018, indicating (at top left) the cold front extending diagonally across South Africa. A corresponding RGB image, also valid for 08h00SAST at top right shows the central eye of Severe Tropical Storm Eliakim, currently over the north-eastern coastline of Madagascar. Due to sustained clockwise-oriented flow around this system, the eastern coast and adjacent mountains will experience the heaviest, persistent and extreme rainfall this weekend. © Eumetsat 2018.

Whilst this tropical storm system is undoubtedly severe, in terms of impacts on local Madagascan communities and infrastructure, the good news is that Eliakim will not directly affect all of Madagascar, with the more heavily-populated western and south-western parts largely unaffected. Moreover, as Eliakim moves overland, a significant weakening of the system is anticipated. Towards Sunday and Monday, Eliakim is expected to change track quite markedly and is most likely to begin moving towards the south-east and out to sea again, away from Madagascar, as indicated in the latest track in Figure 2 (below).

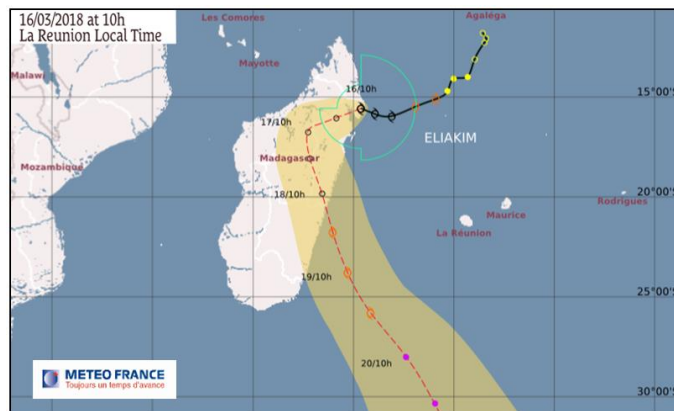


Figure 2: Predicted movement of Severe Tropical Storm Eliakim, as it moves overland into Madagascar this weekend, then moving seawards again in about 48 hours time, but in a generally weakened state. Map prepared by WMO RSMC La Reunion at 08h00SAST today (10h00 La Reunion local time)

The South African Weather Service will continue to monitor any further developments relating to this weather system and will issue subsequent updates as required. Furthermore, the public are urged to regularly follow weather forecasts on television and radio.

Updated information can also be found at www.weathersa.co.za as well as via the SA Weather Service Twitter account **@SAWeatherServic**

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