

Hurricane Gilbert swept toward the Dominican Republic Sunday , and the Civil Defense alerted its heavily populated south coast to prepare for high **winds**, heavy **rains** and high seas.

The **storm** was approaching from the southeast with sustained **winds** of 75 mph gusting to 92 mph .

"There is no need for alarm," Civil Defense Director Eugenio Cabral said in a television alert shortly before midnight Saturday .

Cabral said residents of the province of Barahona should closely follow **Gilbert** 's movement .

An estimated 100,000 people live in the province, including 70,000 in the city of Barahona , about 125 miles west of Santo Domingo .

Tropical **Storm Gilbert** formed in the eastern Caribbean and strengthened into a **hurricane** Saturday night

The National **Hurricane** Center in Miami reported its position at 2a.m. Sunday at latitude 16.1 north , longitude 67.5 west, about 140 miles south of Ponce, Puerto Rico, and 200 miles southeast of Santo Domingo.

The National Weather Service in San Juan , Puerto Rico , said **Gilbert** was moving westward at 15 mph with a "broad area of cloudiness and heavy weather" rotating around the center of the **storm**.

The weather service issued a flash flood watch for Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands until at least 6p.m. Sunday.

Strong **winds** associated with the **Gilbert** brought coastal flooding , strong southeast **winds** and up to 12 feet to Puerto Rico 's south coast.