

More than 27 dead as Typhoon Hagupit hits Philippines

Richard Phillips
9 December 2014

Just 13 months after Typhoon Haiyan killed over 7,000 people and destroyed tens of thousands of homes, Philippines residents have been hit again by a major typhoon. At least 27 people, including two babies, are reported dead in central-eastern Philippines, where Typhoon Hagupit—or “whip” in Filipino—made landfall with wind gusts of up to 210 kilometres an hour on Saturday and Sunday.

The United Nations Global Disaster Alert and Coordination System estimates that almost 13 million people may be affected. Thousands of homes have been destroyed and basic infrastructure—power, telecommunications, roads and bridges—badly damaged in more than 16 provinces.

Although the typhoon was downgraded to a tropical storm by the time it reached the outskirts of Manila on Monday afternoon, state offices, banks and schools were closed. Over 60 domestic and international flights were cancelled in anticipation of the typhoon hitting the 12 million-strong capital.

According to news reports, more than a million people were evacuated from coastal towns and landslide- and flood-prone areas throughout the country, with many being housed in emergency shelters.

Sixteen of those killed on weekend died in Borongan, a town of 64,000 people in Samar, where more than 2,500 homes were destroyed or seriously damaged. Elsewhere in the Eastern Visayas islands, a one-month-old boy and a 62-year-old man died, whilst a one-year-old girl and a 65-year-old man died from hypothermia at Iloilo in the Western Visayas. Two people were killed in Cebu province. These areas were among the hardest hit by Typhoon Haiyan in November last year.

Spokesmen for President Benigno Aquino’s government insisted that the state-organised

evacuations demonstrated that it learnt lessons from last year’s Typhoon Haiyan. Likewise, Manila Mayor Joseph Estrada said the evacuation of more than 5,000 people from a shantytown on the edge of Manila demonstrated that “we’ve prepared and trained for this.”

These claims are bogus. National and local government preparations for the typhoon were grossly inadequate. Even when it first made landfall, Hagupit was substantially weaker than Haiyan, whose winds peaked at 380 kilometres an hour. But if Hagupit had hit Manila yesterday with the same force as in the central-eastern provinces during the weekend, thousands would have been killed.

The evacuation centres, moreover, are over-crowded and entirely make-shift—in schools, churches, council halls and public buildings that lack adequate cooking, sanitary and other basic facilities.

“It’s a really serious situation in the evacuation centres,” Jennifer MacCann, World Vision’s operation director for the typhoon response, told *Bloomberg*. “Many of the families don’t know when they can return home and what they will find once they get there.”

Many of the people accommodated in the evacuation centres scattered across the central-eastern provinces are among the poorest layers of Philippines society. The overwhelming majority of the victims in these centres were rendered homeless by Typhoon Haiyan and were still living in tents or rough shanties before the latest typhoon.

Last weekend, almost 50,000 Tacloban residents were accommodated in 81 evacuation centres. Tacloban, a city of 220,000 on Leyte island, suffered major damage in last year’s Typhoon Haiyan.

Maria Anna Alvarez, 34, told CNN she spent the past

11 months living in a tent with a dozen other relatives on the outskirts of Tacloban, after her home was destroyed. Her tent was provided by an aid agency. It was torn asunder last weekend, along with those of 300 other families rendered homeless by Typhoon Haiyan in Tacloban.

Unemployed truck driver Tereso Sano, 42, who was sharing a makeshift home in Tacloban with seven other people, said he would have to try and rebuild the dwelling. “It’s a difficult feeling, knowing you don’t have a roof above your head,” he said.

Pilar Rangosajo, who was sheltering in an evacuation centre at Legazpi in Alba province, said: “I am worried—I am thinking of my children and my grandchildren. They are so young, that’s why we’re here. It’s so hard for me because every typhoon damages our home. We don’t have the money to fix it.”

In January this year more than 12,000 people demonstrated in Tacloban against the Aquino government’s refusal to provide electricity, water and adequate financial assistance to those made homeless by Typhoon Haiyan.

Survivors denounced political corruption in the construction of temporary shelters and the distribution of relief. They demanded that the government immediately begin construction of public hospitals and schools. These calls, like others made by workers and the urban and rural poor after each typhoon disaster, fell on deaf ears.

The official claims of improved government responses are belied by the fact that in the past three years, major typhoons have claimed over 10,000 lives in the Philippines. The country has an average of 20 typhoons per year between June and December, making the disasters predictable, although the storms have intensified dramatically in recent years.

According to Germanwatch’s global climate risk index, the Philippines was the nation most affected by weather-related disasters in 2013, with losses totalling \$24.5 billion, or 3.8 percent of the country’s gross domestic product.



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