

Typhoon Goni devastates the Philippines

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Typhoon Goni (“Rolly”), the most powerful storm in the world this year, tore through the heavily populated centre of the Philippines over the weekend. Government reports show that at least 20 have been killed, though this number is likely to rise as communications are slowly restored between its island provinces.

The storm made landfall as a super typhoon on the eastern island province of Catanduanes at 4:50 a.m. on Sunday with sustained maximum wind speeds of 310 kph (195 mph) recorded in the turbulent eyewall of the storm, according to the Joint Typhoon Warning Centre. As measured by one-minute average winds, it is the strongest typhoon to make landfall ever recorded in the world.

At least six people died in Catanduanes, and the island is without electricity, water or a cellular network. Provincial governor Joseph Cua told a news conference: “While there’s no more typhoon, we have no air and sea transportation.” The hashtag #NasaanAngCatanduanes or “Where is Catanduanes” has been trending on twitter to encourage recommunication with the area.

An emergency telecommunications team was deployed Monday, along with initial deliveries of food packs.

Cua reported that more than 13,000 homes on the island were damaged with some withstanding a five-metre storm surge. According to a “visual” assessment of the damage from ground level, the Red Cross has suggested that “80 to 90 per cent” of the easternmost town of Virac—home to 70,000 people—had been damaged by the storm.

The storm weakened as it travelled west over the Bicol region—the southern part of the main island of Luzon and the most populous area of the Philippines. Bringing floodwaters, toppling trees and triggering mudslides, it barrelled through the provinces of Albay

to Batangas, just south of the capital Manila, before heading towards the South China Sea.

The storm displaced 382,381 people and left 53,863 homes without electricity, according to government figures. The municipalities of Camarines Sur and Cavite were declared in a state of calamity following the storm. As of yesterday, 165 cities in Calabarzon, Mimaropa, Bicol Region and Eastern Visayas are still experiencing power outages.

Over 50 sections of road are affected by flooding, landslides and uprooted trees throughout the island of Luzon, with 37 still impassable.

Summing up the cost estimates of rebuilding the worst affected areas of Camarines Sur, Metropolitan Manila, Quezon, Cavite and Camarines Norte, the UN office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported \$136 billion in damages, making it among the costliest storms in history.

The storm is a product of unusually warm waters as a result of the La Nina weather event, a phase of the vast oceanic and atmospheric cycle in the Pacific that drives warm surface waters to East Asia, with a resultant upwelling of colder water along the western coast of South America. Sea temperatures in the region where Goni formed are 30 to 31 degrees Celsius, which can lead to very powerful and unpredictable weather events.

Additionally, there is a trend of increasing major natural disasters due to climate change. A 2018 paper by Bhatia et al., “Projected Response of Tropical Cyclone Intensity and Intensification in a Global Climate Model” predicts a multiplication of destructive category 5 tropical cyclones towards the end of the century. From one Super Typhoon similar to Goni every eight years on a global scale, the occurrence is predicted to increase to one every year between 2081 and 2100.

The tropical archipelago of the Philippines is particularly vulnerable to this process, routinely

experiencing around 20 storms and typhoons each year. The last storm, Typhoon Molave, passed through the same region last week killing 22 people.

The country is now on alert for Storm Siony (“Atsani”) likely to become a typhoon and make landfall on Thursday, though this time in the far north of Luzon island. The state weather agency forecasts two to three more typhoons to enter the Philippines in November and another one to two in December.

The UN reported around 68.6 million, or roughly 65 percent of the population are affected by Typhoon Goni, with 24.3 million living in the worst affected areas. Of that number, 2.3 million, including 724,000 children, are classed as “vulnerable.” Those most affected are at increased risk of contracting COVID-19 and other diseases in crowded evacuation centres, or face delayed and inadequate rescue efforts due to the lack of resources.

As of November 2, 385,400 COVID-19 infections have been recorded in the Philippines, with 7,269 deaths, the second-highest in southeast Asia. In order to establish Covid-secure emergency shelters, schools, gyms and government-run evacuation centres were requisitioned, with individual tents provided inside for families.

The mayor of Infanta town in Quezon province, Filipino Grace America, told DZBB radio that “because of the Covid-19 pandemic, our funds for calamity concerns and expenses are insufficient.”

President Rodrigo Duterte flew to Guinobatan municipality in Albay province on Monday, where more than 300 houses are buried under volcanic debris. Residents blamed the mudslide on quarrying operations on the slopes of Mt. Mayon, which had contributed to similar avalanches in previous weather events.

According to the *Philippine Inquirer*, Duterte initially dismissed the residents’ concerns, saying Bicol would always be in harm’s way, “as long as it is facing the Pacific Ocean and a volcano is here.”

Senator Christopher “Bong” Go, accompanying Duterte asked, “Who owns the quarry sites?”

To which a resident shot back, “Politicians!”

Later, bowing to public pressure, 12 groups operating in the area had their permits suspended. It was discovered that operators had left stockpiles on rivers which contributed to debris damage in flooding.



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