

# Earthquake off southern Philippines leaves at least 46 dead

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A deadly earthquake struck off the southern coast of the Philippines on Monday morning, causing the deaths of at least 46 people and injuring nearly 500 more. As of Wednesday evening, at least 17 people remain missing, meaning the death toll could rise. Hundreds of aftershocks have continued to strike the region after the main quake, making rescue operations more difficult. It was one of the strongest earthquakes in the Philippines in 50 years.

The 7.8 magnitude earthquake occurred along the Cotabato Trench, striking the highly-urbanized General Santos City, with a population of more than 700,000 people, as well as the surrounding Sarangani Province on the southern end of Mindanao Island. The earthquake also triggered deadly landslides in the region, with at least 18 people killed as a result, according to the Office of Civil Defense (OCD), which is tasked with responding to disasters in the Philippines.

Numerous low-rise buildings have collapsed. An estimated 2,500 homes have either been damaged or destroyed. Other damaged buildings include schools and hospitals. Approximately 150,000 people have been impacted while 32,000 people were displaced and forced to stay in evacuation centers. However, Faisah Ali, from Save the Children Philippines, reported that, “Evacuation centers cannot accommodate everybody, we have seen families that are staying outside.”

The earthquake cut off large portions of Mindanao from telephone service and electricity. In addition, roads have been destroyed, making transportation and communication with severely affected regions difficult. While power has slowly been restored, according to the government, Mindanao is under a yellow alert, meaning that due to high demand and an inadequate amount of electricity, rolling blackouts are possible. The

Philippines had already been experiencing nationwide power outages as a result of a lack of fuel, due to the illegal US-Israeli war against Iran, coupled with a nationwide heatwave that is straining existing resources.

In addition, more than 6,000 schools in the region have been impacted, with the government ordering classes to be canceled until a damage assessment can be made. Monday was the first day back to school for the 3.2 million students impacted, as they returned from a two-month break. Pictures and videos posted to social media from schools across Mindanao show students outside taking refuge from shaking buildings.

Cesar Sundo, a public school teacher in the town of Lebak, told the BBC, that the earthquake felt like “being vigorously rocked on a hammock for more than two minutes ... and the shaking was getting stronger by the second.” He continued, “Everyone felt dizzy. Our students were shouting and crying while we needed to calm them down. And it was thousands of students.”

The administration of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. issued a statement after the earthquake claiming, “The national government is moving and we will not leave Mindanao behind.” This type of rhetoric is common from politicians around the world after major disasters, who use the designation “natural disaster” to deflect responsibility for the destruction, which is too often significantly worsened by capitalism.

Marcos has proposed no serious measures to alleviate survivors’ suffering or to prevent damage in future earthquakes, which are common in the Philippines. The country sits along the Ring of Fire, a series of fault lines around the Pacific region that generate significant seismic activity. Last September, a magnitude 6.9 earthquake struck the island of Cebu, killing 79 people.

No measures were taken after that earthquake nor will

any measures be taken now. Safety is regularly sacrificed in order to boost profits for big business. Junie Castillo, spokesman for the Office of Civil Defense (OCD), admitted after Monday's earthquake, "With the structural code, what is stated there is that it could withstand a magnitude 8 earthquake, so that is where we need to catch up in implementation." In other words, the buildings that have been destroyed and damaged in the latest earthquake were not up to code. Castillo did not elaborate which buildings were in violation.

The Philippine ruling class as a whole is rife with corruption and this extends into dangerous cost-cutting in construction while consciously ignoring poor existing safety conditions in order to boost the profits of big business.

Ven Paolo Valenzuela, a research fellow at the Singapore Management University's College of Integrative Studies, remarked last October after the Cebu earthquake that for every \$US1 invested in disaster prevention, it would save \$US7 to \$US8 in disaster response. "Has [the Philippines] been investing in that dollar? And once a disaster strikes, how sure are we that the \$US8 is actually going towards proper response and building back better?"

Valenzuela referenced the numerous "ghost projects" throughout the Philippines; phony projects that have been funded to the tune of 1.47 trillion pesos (\$US24 billion) over the past 15 years supposedly to address flood prevention while no actual work has been completed. It is entirely likely that a similar skimming of funds at the expense of earthquake safety has also taken place.

The danger represented by a major earthquake in the Philippines has been described as a ticking time bomb. Citing the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (PHIVOLCS), the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* reported in April 2025, following the major earthquake in Myanmar in March, that a similar earthquake of magnitude 7.2 along the West Valley Fault could kill more than 33,000 people and destroy 168,000 buildings. Metro Manila, one of the world's most densely populated cities with a population of 14 million, sits along the fault.

Knowledge of the danger is not new. OCD Undersecretary Ariel Nepomuceno told the *Inquirer* last year, "Based on the scientific study done

by JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency) and PHIVOLCS in 2004, around 500,000 structures are vulnerable."

A significant reason for this danger is the use of substandard steel and rebar in the Philippines that is not capable of withstanding earthquakes. Yet despite this, oversight regarding the type of steel used in construction, onsite inspections and other measures to ensure safety are largely nonexistent. Those standards that do exist are not enforced.

This is not simply a result of incompetence. Whatever the rhetoric of the government, after each earthquake, no serious measures are taken to address the very real danger that exists in the Philippines. This is done to ensure profits continue to flow into the pockets of big business, as they flout safety to cut costs at the expense of the lives of workers and the poor.



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