

Typhoon Victims in Philippines Plead for Aid

Officials say that Friday's typhoon may have killed 10,000 or more people

By [Associated Press](#)

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Survivors look at a military C-130 plane which arrives at typhoon-ravaged Tacloban city, Leyte province central Philippines on Monday, Nov. 11, 2013. (AP Photo/Aaron Favila)

TACLOBAN, Philippines (AP) - Bloating bodies lay uncollected and uncounted in the streets and desperate survivors pleaded for food, water and medicine as rescue workers took on a daunting task Monday in the typhoon-battered islands of the Philippines. Thousands were feared dead.

The hard-hit city of Tacloban resembled a garbage dump from the air, with only a few concrete buildings left standing in the wake of one of the most powerful storms to ever hit land, packing 147-mph winds and whipping up 20-foot walls of seawater that tossed ships inland and swept many out to sea.

"Help. SOS. We need food," read a message painted by a survivor in large letters on the ravaged city's port, where water lapped at the edge.

There was no one to carry away the dead, which lay rotting along the main road from the airport to Tacloban, the worst-hit city along the country's remote eastern seaboard.

[Photos: Typhoon Haiyan Slams into Philippines](#)



At a small naval base, eight swollen corpses - including that of a baby - were submerged in water brought in by the storm. Officers had yet to move them, saying they had no body bags or electricity to preserve them.

Authorities estimated the typhoon killed 10,000 or more people, but with the slow pace of recovery, the official death toll three days after the storm made landfall remained at 942.

However, with shattered communications and transportation links, the final count was likely days away, and presidential spokesman Edwin Lacierda said "we pray" it does not surpass 10,000.

"I don't believe there is a single structure that is not destroyed or severely damaged in some way - every single building, every single house," U.S. Marine Brig. Gen. Paul Kennedy said after taking a helicopter flight over Tacloban, the largest city in Leyte province. He spoke on the tarmac at the airport, where two Marine C-130 cargo planes were parked, engines running, unloading supplies.

Authorities said at least 9.7 million people in 41 provinces were affected by the typhoon, known as Haiyan elsewhere in Asia but called Yolanda in the Philippines. It was likely the deadliest natural disaster to beset this poor Southeast Asian nation.

"Please tell my family I'm alive," said Erika Mae Karakot as she stood among a throng of people waiting for aid. "We need water and medicine because a lot of the people we are with are wounded. Some are suffering from diarrhea and dehydration due to shortage of food and water."

Philippine soldiers were distributing food and water, and assessment teams from the United Nations and other international agencies were seen Monday for the first time. The U.S. military dispatched food, water, generators and a contingent of Marines to the city, the first outside help in what will swell into a major international relief mission.

Authorities said they had evacuated some 800,000 people ahead of the typhoon, but many evacuation centers proved to be no protection against the wind and rising water. The Philippine National Red Cross, responsible for warning the region and giving advice, said people were not prepared for a storm surge.

"Imagine America, which was prepared and very rich, still had a lot of challenges at the time of Hurricane Katrina, but what we had was three times more than what they received," said Gwendolyn Pang, the group's executive director.

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Emily Ortega, 21 and about to give birth, said she clung to a post to survive after the evacuation center she fled to was devastated by the 20-foot (6-meter) storm surge. She reached safety at the airport, where she gave birth to a baby girl, Bea Joy Sagales, whose arrival drew applause from the military medics who assisted in the delivery.

The wind, rain and coastal storm surges transformed neighborhoods into twisted piles of debris, blocking roads and trapping decomposing bodies underneath. Cars and trucks lay upended among flattened homes, and bridges and ports were washed away.

"In some cases the devastation has been total," said Secretary to the Cabinet Rene Almendras.

At U.N. climate talks in Warsaw, Poland, the envoy from the Philippines broke down in tears as he described waiting in agony for news from relatives caught in the massive storm's path.

"In solidarity with my countrymen, who are struggling to find food back home ... I will now commence a voluntary fasting for the climate," said the envoy, Naderev "Yeb" Sano, who urged delegates to work toward "meaningful" change. His emotional appeal was met with a standing ovation.

In Tacloban, residents stripped malls, shops and homes of food, water and consumer goods. Officials said some of the looting smacked of desperation but in other cases people hauled away TVs, refrigerators, Christmas trees and even a treadmill. An Associated Press reporter said he saw about 400 special forces and soldiers patrolling downtown to guard against further chaos.

Brig. Gen. Kennedy said Philippine forces were handling security well and U.S. troops were "looking at how to open up roads and land planes and helicopters" in order to bring in shelter, water and other supplies.

Still, those caught in the storm were worried that aid would not arrive soon enough.

"We're afraid that it's going to get dangerous in town because relief goods are trickling in very slow," said Bobbie Womack, an American missionary from Athens, Tenn. "I know it's a massive, massive undertaking to try to feed a town of over 150,000 people. They need to bring in shiploads of food."

Womack's husband, Larry, said he chose to stay at their beachside home in Tacloban, only to find the storm surge engulfing it. He survived by climbing onto a beam in the roof.

"The roof was lifting up and the wind was coming through and there were waves going over my head," he said. "The sound was loud. It was just incredible."

Marvin Daga, a 19-year-old student, tried to ride out the storm in his home with his ailing father, Mario, but the storm surge carried the building away.

They clung to each other while the house floated for a while, but it eventually crumbled and they fell into churning waters. The teen grabbed a coconut tree with one hand and his father with the other, but he slipped out of his grasp.

"I hope that he survived," Marvin said as tears filled his eyes. "But I'm not expecting to find him anymore."

Philippine President Benigno Aquino III declared a "state of national calamity," allowing the central government to release emergency funds quicker and impose price controls on staple goods. He said the two worst-hit provinces, Leyte and Samar, had witnessed "massive destruction and loss of life" but that elsewhere casualties were low.

Haiyan hit the eastern seaboard of the Philippines on Friday and quickly barreled across its central islands, with winds that gusted to 170 mph. It inflicted serious damage to at least six islands in the middle of the eastern seaboard.

The storm's sustained winds weakened to 74 mph as the typhoon made landfall in northern Vietnam early Monday after crossing the South China Sea, according to the Hong Kong meteorological observatory. Authorities there evacuated hundreds of thousands of people, but there were no reports of significant damage or injuries.

It was downgraded to a tropical storm as it entered southern China later Monday, and weather officials forecast torrential rain in the area until Tuesday. No major damage was reported in China, though Xinhua News Agency said heavy winds tore a cargo ship from its moorings in southern China and drove it out to sea, killing at least two crew members.

The Philippines, an archipelago nation of more than 7,000 islands, is annually buffeted by tropical storms and typhoons, which are called hurricanes and cyclones elsewhere. The impoverished and densely populated nation of 96 million people is in the northwestern Pacific, right in the path of the world's No. 1 typhoon generator, according to meteorologists. The archipelago's exposed eastern seaboard often bears the brunt.

Even by the standards of the Philippines, however, Haiyan was an especially large catastrophe. Its winds were among the strongest ever recorded, and it appears to have killed more people than the previous deadliest Philippine storm, Thelma, in which about 5,100 people died in the central Philippines in 1991.

The country's deadliest disaster on record was the 1976 magnitude-7.9 earthquake that triggered a tsunami in the Moro Gulf in the southern Philippines, killing 5,791 people.

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News Update

TACLOBAN, Philippines (AP) - The day after Typhoon Haiyan struck the eastern Philippine coast, a team of 15 doctors and logistics experts was ready to fly here to the worst-hit city to help. On Tuesday, five days into what could be the country's deadliest disaster, they were still waiting to leave.

Aid is coming to Tacloban: medical supplies, pallets of water and food piled on trucks, planes and ferries, sent by the Philippine government and countries around the world. But the scale of the disaster and challenges of delivering the assistance means few in this city, strewn with debris and corpses, have received any help.

A team from Médecins Sans Frontières, complete with medical supplies, arrived in Cebu island on Saturday looking for a flight to Tacloban, but hadn't left by Tuesday. A spokesman for the group said it

was "difficult to tell" when it would be able to leave.

"We are in contact with the authorities, but the (Tacloban) airport is only for the Philippines military use," Lee Pik Kwan said in a telephone interview.

[Photos: Typhoon Haiyan Slams into Philippines](#)



At the medics' intended destination, thousands of typhoon victims were trying to get out. They camped at the airport and ran onto the tarmac when planes came in, surging past a broken iron fence and a few soldiers and police trying to control them. Most didn't make it aboard.

"We need help. Nothing is happening," said Aristone Balute, an 81-year-old who didn't get on a flight out of the city. "We haven't eaten since yesterday afternoon." Her clothes were soaked from the rain, and tears streamed down her face.

An Associated Press reporter drove through the town for around 7 kilometers (4 miles) on Wednesday and saw more than 40 bodies. He saw no evidence of any organized delivery of food, water or medical supplies, though piles of aid have begun to arrive at the airport. Some people were lining up to get water from a hose, presumably from the city supply.

"There is a huge amount that we need to do. We have not been able to get into the remote communities," U.N. humanitarian chief Valerie Amos said in Manila. "Even in Tacloban, because of the debris and the difficulties with logistics and so on, we have not been able to get in the level of supply

that we would want to. We are going to do as much as we can to bring in more."

Presidential spokesman Edwin Lacierda said relief goods were getting into the city, and the supply should increase in coming days now that the airport and a bridge to the island were open.

"We are not going to leave one person behind - one living person behind," he said. "We will help, no matter how difficult, no matter how inaccessible."

Doctors in Tacloban said they were desperate for medicine. Beside the ruined airport tower, at a small makeshift clinic with shattered windows, army and air force medics said they had treated around 1,000 people for cuts, bruises, lacerations and deep wounds.

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"It's overwhelming," said Air Force Capt. Antonio Tamayo. "We need more medicine. We cannot give anti-tetanus vaccine shots because we have none."

The longer survivors go without access to clean water, food, shelter and medical help, the greater chance of disease breaking out and people dying as a result of wounds sustained in the storm.

The official death toll from the disaster rose to 1,774 on Tuesday, though authorities have said they expect that to rise markedly. They fear estimates of 10,000 dead are accurate and might be low. More than 9 million people have been affected across a large swath of the country, many of them made homeless.

Tacloban, a city of about 220,000 people on Leyte island, bore the full force of the winds and the tsunami-like storm surges. Most of the city is in ruins, a tangled mess of destroyed houses, cars and trees. Malls, garages and shops have all been stripped of food and water by hungry residents.

The loss of life appears to be concentrated in Tacloban and surrounding areas, including a portion of Samar island that is separated from Leyte island by a strait. It is possible that other devastated areas are so isolated they have not yet been reached.

In Cebu, to the southwest, the Philippine air force has been sending three C-130s back and forth to Tacloban from dawn to dusk, and had delivered 400,000 pounds of relief supplies by Tuesday, Lt. Col. Marciano Jesus Guevara said. A lack of electricity in Tacloban means planes can't land there at night.

Guevara said the C-130s have transported nearly 3,000 civilians out of the disaster zone, and that the biggest problem in Tacloban is a lack of clean drinking water.

"Water is life," he said. "If you have water with no food, you'll survive."

There is also growing concern about recovering corpses that are still rotting throughout the disaster zone. "It really breaks your heart when you see them," said Maj. Gen. Romeo Poquiz, commander of the 2nd Air Division.

"We're limited with manpower, the expertise, as well as the trucks that have to transport them to different areas for identification," Poquiz said. "Do we do a mass burial, because we can't identify them anymore? If we do a mass burial, where do you place them?"

Most Tacloban residents spent the night under pouring rain wherever they could - in the ruins of destroyed houses, in the open along roadsides and shredded trees. Some slept under tents brought in by the government or relief groups.

"There is no help coming in. They know this is a tragedy. They know our needs are urgent. Where is the shelter?" said Aristone Balute's granddaughter, Mylene, who was also at the airport. "We are confused. We don't know who is in charge."

Damaged roads and other infrastructure are complicating the relief efforts. Government officials and police and army officers are in many cases among the victims themselves, hampering coordination. The typhoon destroyed military buildings that housed 1,000 soldiers in Leyte province.

There were other distractions, including a jailbreak in Tacloban. Army Brig. Gen. Virgilio Espineli, the deputy regional military commander, said Tuesday he wasn't sure how many of the 600 inmates fled.

At Matnog, the port for ferries leaving to Samar island, dozens of trucks piled high with aid were waiting to cross. In the capital, Manila, soldiers tossed pallets of water, medical supplies and foods into C-130 planes bound for the disaster area.

The United Nations said it had released \$25 million in emergency funds to pay for emergency shelter materials and household items, and for assistance with the provision of emergency health services, safe water supplies and sanitation facilities. It's launching an appeal for more aid.

The aircraft carrier USS George Washington is headed toward the region with massive amounts of water and food, but the Pentagon said it won't arrive until Thursday. The U.S. also said it is providing \$20 million in immediate aid.

Aid totaling tens of millions of dollars has been pledged by many other countries, including Japan, Australia and Britain, which is sending a Royal Navy vessel with aid.

For now, relief has come to a lucky few, including Joselito Caimoy, a 42-year-old truck driver. He was able to get his wife, son and 3-year-old daughter on a flight out of Tacloban. They embraced in a tearful goodbye, but Caimoy stayed behind to guard what's left of his home and property.

"People are just scavenging in the streets. People are asking food from relatives, friends. The devastation is too much ... the malls, the grocery stores have all been looted," he said. "They're empty. People are hungry. And they (the authorities) cannot control the people."

The dead, decomposing and stinking, litter the streets or remain trapped in the debris.

The storm also killed eight people in southern China and inflicted hundreds of millions of dollars in damage to farming and fishing industries, Chinese state media reported Tuesday.

The Philippines, an archipelago nation of more than 7,000 islands, is annually buffeted by tropical storms and typhoons, but Haiyan was an especially large catastrophe. Its winds were among the strongest ever recorded, and it may have killed more people than the previous deadliest Philippine storm, Thelma, in which about 5,100 people died in the central Philippines in 1991.

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Tacloban is near Red Beach on Leyte Island, where U.S. Gen. Douglas MacArthur waded ashore in 1944 during World War II and fulfilled his famous pledge: "I shall return." The scene is re-created in a monument on the shore. After the typhoon, one of the seven statues - but not the one of MacArthur himself - was toppled over.