

Storm Leaves Dozens Dead in Philippines



Francis R. Malasig/European Pressphoto Agency

People waded through floodwaters following heavy rains brought about by tropical storm Ketsana (locally known as Ondoy) on Sunday in Cainta, east of Manila, Philippin

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MANILA — At least 83 people were killed and dozens of others were missing after a tropical storm swept through the northern Philippines over the weekend, with Manila experiencing its worst flooding in nearly half a century, officials said Sunday.

As of Sunday afternoon, countless citizens in the capital remained on the roofs of their houses, where they had spent the night drenched and unable to come down because of the floodwaters that had accumulated since the rain began falling Friday evening.

Thousands of families in the capital and in nearby towns and provinces moved out of their homes as early as Saturday afternoon. Many people died in a landslide in Rizal, a province adjacent to Metro Manila that was among the hardest hit. In Marikina City, a Manila suburb, several of those who did not evacuate their homes in a subdivision by the Marikina River were found dead on Sunday.

Tropical Storm Ketsana, packing winds of 85 kilometers per hour, or 53 miles per hour, with gusts of up to 100 kilometers per hour, dumped 42.4 centimeters, or 16.7 inches, of rain in just 12 hours, said Nathaniel Cruz, the government's chief weather forecaster. He said the rain that fell in those 12 hours was equivalent to the amount of rain that Manila received in the whole of September.

Officials said nearly 300,000 people were displaced by Ketsana; tens of thousands were brought to evacuation centers in schools, churches, gymnasiums and public parks. In Marikina, people pitched tents wherever they could, some on the bridge over the overflowing Marikina River.

Metro Manila is a city of more than 12 million people. It has been having trouble coping with a sewage system that is perennially choked with garbage. Many parts of the city are often flooded by the slightest downpour.

The storm "submerged up to 80 percent of the city, and covered areas that never experienced flooding before, stranding people on rooftops and bringing death and misery to rich and poor alike," according to Greenpeace.

"It was terrifying to see the water rising, especially because there were live electrical wires around us," said Diverson Bloso Jr., a waiter at a restaurant in Quezon City that was one of many flooded establishments. "There were trash and rats and cockroaches all around us," Mr. Bloso said as he cleaned the restaurant's soaked wooden tables.

King Catoy, a filmmaker, rushed to Marikina City on Sunday to find out what had happened to friends who lived there. He described what

greeted him there as heartbreaking. "The ground was just muck," he said.

As he moved deeper into the city, camera in hand, Mr. Catoy recorded scenes of devastation: streets and houses covered in muck, trees that had crashed into buildings, people washing salvaged belongings in the murky river, belongings hanging by electric posts and trees, a couple holding their five dogs — the only ones left with them after the storm.

"Marikina City always prided itself of being the most orderly, the cleanest and the most prepared city in the whole country," Mr. Catoy said. Ketsana, he said, "showed that all that may have been just a facade, like those colored houses," referring to the row of houses that the Marikina government built for the homeless, its facade painted in pastel colors to better hide the slum community behind it. These brightly colored houses were smeared with mud on Saturday.

Indeed, according to Greenpeace, the storm exposed, if anything, Metro Manila's unpreparedness to deal with a storm as powerful as Ketsana. Volunteers, the group said, "saw firsthand how unprepared we are to deal with such extreme weather events. Even after the waters subsided, aid and rescue workers from government, N.G.O.'s and the private sector were still overwhelmed."

On Sunday, the rain began pouring again late in the day, raising fear among many that their suffering might be prolonged. Worsening the concern was the government weather bureau's announcement that another storm was approaching the Philippines.

Although the storm cut power, telephone and water supply in many areas, Internet connections were generally not affected. On Facebook and Twitter, many Filipinos called out for help and shared their grief.

The social networks proved helpful as the hotlines of the government's disaster agencies were swamped with calls. It was also on Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and other social media networks that details of the disaster and the extent of the damage first emerged: flooded streets, cars floating like boats, houses knee-deep in water, and people — among them Cristina Reyes, a popular actress — shivering on their rooftops.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/28/world/asia/28philip.html>