

Destructive typhoon hits the Philippines

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Fallen trees caused by Typhoon Rai seen in Siargao Island, Surigao del Norte, Philippines, December 17, 2021 [Philippine Coast Guard/Handout via Reuters]

Manila, December 18 (RHC)-- More than 18,000 soldiers and emergency personnel are joining search and rescue efforts in the Philippines, after the strongest typhoon to hit the country this year caused "severe damage" in central and southern regions.

The deployment on Saturday comes as the death toll from Typhoon Rai rose to 21, and people in affected regions pleaded for basic necessities. The storm, known locally as Odette, was a super typhoon when it slammed into the eastern island of Siargao on Thursday, packing maximum sustained winds of 195

kilometres per hour (120 miles per hour).

More than 300,000 people were forced to flee their homes as the storm ravaged the central and southern regions of the country, knocking out communications in many areas and toppling concrete power poles.

Mark Timbal, a spokesman for the national disaster agency, said “there has been severe damage” in Siargao island as well as in the city of Surigao on the neighbouring island of Mindanao.

Communications are still down in both Siargao and Surigao, he told the AFP news agency. The Philippine Coast Guard has shared photos on social media showing widespread destruction around Surigao city, with roofs torn off buildings, wooden structures shattered and palm trees stripped of fronds.

Aerial footage showed swathes of rice fields under water. In Dinagat, an island province west of Siargao, Vice Governor Nilo Demerey told broadcaster ABS-CBN that the storm had left at least six people dead. “Odette was so strong,” Demerey said, using the local name for the typhoon.

Residents “are trying to repair their houses because even our evacuation centres were torn down. They can’t seek refuge anywhere else ... everything was destroyed.” “Siargao, Surigao and Dinagat island all suffered the same fate – we are appealing for help,” he added.

In Surigao City, another three people were reported killed on Saturday, taking the overall death toll to 21.

Scientists have long warned that typhoons are becoming more powerful and strengthening more rapidly as the world becomes warmer because of human-driven climate change.

The Philippines – ranked as one of the world’s most vulnerable countries to the impacts of climate change – is hit by an average of 20 storms and typhoons every year, which typically wipe out harvests, homes and infrastructure in already impoverished areas.

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