

Mozambicans seek shelter as storm Freddy makes landfall

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A man walks as Cyclone Freddy makes landfall over Vilankulos, Mozambique, February 24, 2023. UNICEF Mozambique/223/Alfredo Zuniga/via REUTERS

Maputo, February 25 (RHC)-- Mozambicans have taken shelter as Tropical Storm Freddy made landfall and heavy rains are expected to batter the country's southern provinces for several days.

Freddy made landfall on Friday in the coastal town of Vilanculos with wind speeds of 113 kilometres per hour (70 miles per hour). It was classified as an "intense tropical cyclone" after strengthening over the

Mozambique Channel.

French weather forecaster Meteo France, which has a cyclone-monitoring station on the Indian Ocean island of La Reunion, said Freddy hit the coast near the tourist town of Vilanculos in Inhambane province about 2pm (12:00 GMT).

No casualties had been reported two hours later although trees and rooftops had fallen, Vilanculos district administrator Edmundo Galiza Matos said in a statement. Pictures posted by Matos on Facebook showed children and adults sitting on the floor of a crowded primary school classroom. He said 183 people had taken shelter there.

"The Government of Vilankulo continues to monitor the situation on the ground and thanks the population for responding positively to the appeals of the authorities," the statement said.

Freddy is projected to weaken as it barrels across Southern Africa, but it still poses a serious risk because it is forecast to generate heavy rainfall also in the neighbouring nations of South Africa, Zambia, Malawi and Botswana, according to the regional weather centre in Reunion.

Some parts of northern South Africa are at risk of flooding and wind damage, the South African government said in a statement. "There is a potential risk that months' worth of rainfall may fall in the space of a few days, causing widespread flooding in an area which already has saturated soils and high river basin levels from unusually heavy seasonal rains," the United Nations weather agency warned.

Cornelder de Moçambique, a company that operates cargo terminals in Mozambique's main port, Beira, said in a statement that the port was closed until 7pm (17:00 GMT) on Friday, subject to weather conditions improving.

Up to 1.75 million people could be affected by the storm and severe flooding, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said in a statement. "The confluence of multiple threats is compounding a severe humanitarian situation in Mozambique," the agency said, adding that aid agencies were deploying staff to Inhambane and Gaza provinces.

Mozambique has already been battling severe flooding in recent days, and the government has declared a state of red alert to expedite operations to tackle Freddy.

It hit Madagascar this week as a tropical cyclone, destroying houses, displacing thousands of people and killing at least seven. Freddy weakened slightly as it ploughed through the island nation on Tuesday night before regaining strength over the ocean on Wednesday night and Thursday.

In Zimbabwe, which is expected to see heavy rain from Freddy, the education ministry has suspended school in six provinces.

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