

Beat: News

Solomon Islands flooding kills 21, leaves thousands homeless

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USPA News - Flash floods in the Solomon Islands have killed at least 21 people and left thousands more homeless, officials in the South Pacific island nation said on Sunday as the full extent of the devastation became clear. The death toll is expected to rise.

The Matanikau river in the capital Honiara unexpectedly burst its banks on late Thursday after days of torrential rain, destroying homes and other buildings as it inundated much of the city's downtown area. The heavy rain and flooding was associated with a tropical depression that has since developed into Tropical Cyclone Ita. "The scale of destruction is like something never seen before in the Solomon Islands," said Graham Kenna of charity Save the Children. "A house has even been washed onto the runway of the international airport. The raging floodwaters have washed entire homes out to sea, smashing the city of Honiara to bits." The National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) said 21 people had been confirmed dead by Sunday, including 17 in Honiara and two fatalities elsewhere on the island of Guadalcanal. Two people were also killed in the town of Buala on Santa Isabel Island in Isabel Province, one of them in a landslide and the other in flooding. In the capital alone, authorities reported that 30 people were missing with more than 12,000 people affected, including hundreds who have taken shelter at an evacuation center established inside the terminal of Honiara International Airport. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said there was an urgent need for additional food, water, clothing, blankets and mosquito nets. "River systems across the northwest, central and north of the island have flooded, destroying homes, damaging bridges and displacing families. There are also reports of landslides and loss of food gardens," OCHA said in a situation report on Sunday, adding that an estimated 40,000 out of 93,000 people on the island were affected. OCHA said details about the extent of the damage in other provinces remained sketchy, with limited communication to many areas. Additional damage has been reported in Makira-Ulawa province from a strong 6.0-magnitude earthquake that struck the island of Makira on late Friday, but it was not clear whether the quake had resulted in additional casualties.

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