

Mercy Air Helicopter Team Rescues Flood Victims in Mozambique

The helicopter sweeps low over swirling brown waters surrounding the towns and villages. Herds of animals are trapped on the smallest patches of high ground, huddled tightly together and lowing pitifully. On the rooftops of people's houses are groups of bewildered children surrounded by goats, chickens, cooking pots, plastic chairs, beds, blankets and buckets. Everything families hold dear has been gathered there in hope of rescue. Some people have resorted to climbing trees to avoid the rising water, others are wading through the strong currents in search of refuge.

The sheer volume of water currently flooding Mozambique on the east coast of southern Africa defies belief. The extent of the flooding of the Limpopo River is as bad as—if not worse than—the 2000 floods that hit the news headlines around the world.

Matthias Reuter and Michael Aebi, pilots with Mercy Air, a Christian aviation ministry that partners with YWAM in Mozambique, were involved in search and rescue efforts on that occasion too. But in spite of their previous experience, Matthias said this time, "It was overwhelming to see, we were not prepared for that."

In recent years, Mozambique's national disaster management agency, the INGC, has done a commendable job of relocating thousands of people away from the more risky, flood-prone areas of the country, to higher ground. Those places Mercy Air used to land during the rescues of 2000 are now under water. People have reported that one town was submerged under 2 meters of water. Roads have been completely cut off and from

the air there is water as far as the eye can see.

This is Matthias' story as he relayed it to Stephen Mbewe, YWAM's national leader for Mozambique:

"I heard a South African Air Force (SAAF) Oryx helicopter on the same radio frequency as us, so I asked him if they were equipped with a winch and able to come to our GPS position. That first rescue was of two women we found trying to swim through the strong brown current, holding on for dear life to a closed plastic bucket containing their belongings. The helicopter winch operation was a success and their lives were saved.

"Now we continued scouting for more groups of survivors, directing the SAAF helicopter to the exact locations to rescue them. Some families we found had climbed into trees and I wondered how long had they been there, waiting for help.

"Continuing the search, we hovered slow and low over the muddy flood waters, not wanting to miss anyone. The hard fact keeps hitting me that we must have missed people who might have been rescued. I feel guilty about that; I pray they are found tomorrow. Government boats are still continuing their search and rescue.

"In this short operation with SAAF, over just one afternoon, we saved more than 20 people: women with children on their backs, some men, and several weak and elderly people. During the 30 second turn-around time, every time we were on the ground, many children came to us with waving hands, asking to be flown away too.

"As I think of those families on the rooftops I ask myself, 'What do they eat tonight?' All the food got destroyed by the unexpected floodwaters that rose so suddenly. How do they go to the toilet, on a roof top? How long will they remain healthy, if they drink only the brown water around them? Do the people on top of their houses know that others in far-away

countries care about them? Do they still keep hope?"

May we urge you, whether they know it or not, to pray for the people of Mozambique as God stirs your heart with compassion. As Israel Jovo, a YWAMer working in Mozambique, said: "We never forget that it in times like this our Father rises up to show mercy to those who belong to Him."

Pray for Mercy Air as they continue to support by air the efforts of aid organizations such as CARE, Save the Children, Concern and Samaritan's Purse.