

Relief Groups Aid Philippines Flood Victims

✖ Humanitarian groups are assisting victims of what some are calling the Hurricane Katrina of the Philippines.

In just 12 hours Saturday, Typhoon Ketsana dropped more than a month's worth of rain in Manila, flooding the homes of more than 1.9 million residents. More than 240 people have died and an estimated 380,000 people are displaced.

Operation Blessing International (OBI), which has offices in Manila, is distributing food and water, partnering with local groups to conduct cleanup efforts and deploying medical teams to some of the hardest-hit areas.

"This is Hurricane Katrina of the Philippines," said Dr. Kim April C. Pascual, executive vice president and chief operating officer for OBI Philippines, whose own home is also under water. "Almost a month's worth of rainfall has submerged riverbank cities like Marikina and Pasig, and buried neighboring cities and provinces under ravaging floodwaters, putting the whole region under a state of calamity."

World Vision, which is the one of the world's largest Christian humanitarian aid organizations, has set a goal of helping at least 100,000 of those in dire need. Working with the Philippine Coast Guard, the agency is targeting four of Manila's hardest-hit areas, all of which are home to thousands of poor residents living in low-lying areas next to a river.

To date, World Vision has been able to deliver relief packs via helicopter. Fellow Christian relief organization Catholic Relief Services is also providing immediate assistance by distributing food among those who fled throughout the northern island of Luzon.

“Thousands of people have lost all they owned-their food, their clothing, bedding, school items, and kitchen equipment,” said Boy Bersales, a director for World Vision Philippines. “But their immediate needs are for food and water. Many have gone without either for hours and hours and the children are especially vulnerable having been trapped in flooded conditions for several days. The city is only now waking up to the massive extent of the devastation.”

World Vision is assisting storm victims in Vietnam, where the storm made landfall on Tuesday. The storm killed at least 23 people, and more than 170,000 were evacuated from its path, the Associated Press (AP) reported. World Vision reported that 700 families who were evacuated received small packs of food assistance to see them through the disaster.

“We believe the communities we work in are well prepared for disasters,” said Danny Selvanayagam, national director of World Vision Vietnam. “We feel that people were made well aware of the approaching typhoon and World Vision is well geared up to respond to any suffering that may result.”

Philippines officials appealed for international aid, warning they may not have enough resources to withstand two new storms forecasters have identified in the Pacific Ocean, the AP reported. One storm could hit the northern Philippines later this week and the other early next week.