

Worshippers Gather at Battered Churches, Begging for Divine Intervention After Cyclone

Worshippers gathered at battered churches in the Mozambican port of Beira on Sunday, praying for divine protection as the death toll crept up from a cyclone and floods around southern Africa.

"We asked Jesus to protect us, so that this does not happen again," said congregant and survivor Maria Domingas, 60, who saw trees crashing into her house and water filling her bedroom.

Cyclone Idai hit Beira, on the Indian Ocean, with winds up to 170 kph (105 mph), before barrelling inland to Zimbabwe and Malawi, flattening homes and killing at least 656 people.

[Click here to learn more about Cyclone Idai.](#)

Mozambique's death toll rose to 446 from 417, a government minister said on Sunday. In Zimbabwe, U.N. agencies have given different tolls of 259 and 154, while in Malawi 56 people died in heavy rains ahead of Idai.

At the Universal Church in Beira, evangelical Christians gathered in the patio due to heavy damage from the cyclone. The sheet metal roof had caved in, cables draped across wooden chairs, and the floor was a mess of broken rubble.

The congregation stretched arms skywards and swayed in prayer. "You can see the strength in their eyes," said the 36-year-old pastor, known as Junior. "From today, we are looking forward."

As he led the service with some 150 people, a piece of partly

detached roof rattled in the wind.

"Only with God can we move forward," said Rosa Manuel, 59, who lost a house she had built to rent.

Mozambique's Land and Environment Minister Celso Correia said the cyclone had affected 531,000 people in his country, with 110,000 people in makeshift camps.

Helicopters and boats have been rescuing some people stranded for days on rooftops and trees.

Some survivors have been digging through rubble with their bare hands to search for loved ones, while government and aid agencies have been flying in help.

There are fears of disease.

"We will have cholera, we will have malaria. It's unavoidable in this situation, so the government is opening a cholera treatment center already," Correia told reporters.

Sebastian Rhodes Stampa, of the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), said the humanitarian situation was gradually improving.

"Every day the water recedes we reach more people. Every day the roads open we have better access and we can deliver at more volume and that is the important thing here," he said.

In Washington, the Pentagon said it would provide up to \$6.5 million in humanitarian assistance to provide logistics support for up to 10 days, beginning March 22.

"The scope of logistics support includes airlift of relief materials, responders and 3rd party personnel," a Pentagon statement said.

"U.S. Africa Command is actively monitoring and assessing the situation while positioning assets to support the Government

of the Republic of Mozambique," the top U.S. general responsible for Africa said in a separate statement.

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