

Natural disasters killed over 22,000 in 2013, Red Cross says

October 16 2014, by Jonathan Fowler

Natural disasters claimed over 22,000 lives last year, with Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines the deadliest of all, the Red Cross said Thursday.

In its annual report on disasters, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) warned that the outlook was bleak.

"Climate change is leading to damaged livelihoods and increased vulnerabilities. Natural hazards are also becoming more frequent and extreme," said IFRC head Elhadj As Sy.

"The resulting stresses on social, physical and economic systems are shifting the world into a new era of risk," he added.

Haiyan, which struck in November 2013, slammed a massive storm surge into the city of Tacloban and surrounding communities in the eastern province of Leyte.

At least 7,986 perished, the IFRC said.

The next-deadliest disaster was the June 2013 monsoon flooding in India, which killed 6,054 people.

Last year's overall natural disaster death toll was 22,452, the IFRC said.

That was well under the 2004-2013 average of 97,954 per year.

It was also far below the decade's peak year, 2004, when 242,829 people perished, mostly in the Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami.

The number of people affected by disasters in 2013—almost 100 million, overwhelmingly in Asia—was also the lowest in a decade.

But the report's lead editor Terry Cannon said tolls were only part of the story.

"Major hazards and disasters are distributed randomly. So comparing year-on-year in a data set like this is not very useful," he said.

What tolls can reveal, however, is a country's ability to head off catastrophe.

For example, 36 people died when Cyclone Phailin hit India in October 2013.

Thousands of lives were saved thanks to a widely-praised risk reduction programme which included pre-planned evacuation, repeated this week when Cyclone Hudhud struck.

More people in harm's way

Rapid economic shifts, population growth and urbanisation in developing nations are putting more people in harm's way, while experts warn that [climate change](#) driven by emissions of heat-trapping greenhouse gases is causing more frequent extreme weather events.

Besides thinking up risk reduction plans, governments and aid agencies need to make more effort to understand the lives of people in danger

zones, said Cannon.

"The vast majority of people do not die or suffer in disasters. They suffer because of the problems of everyday life, whether it's bad water, poor nutrition, or bad health," he said.

"People don't give priority to severe hazards. They will highlight their day-to-day problems, health, malaria, water supply, not enough food, not enough jobs," he added.

The report said that estimated economic damage in 2013, at \$119 billion, was the fourth-lowest in a decade.

However, financial totals do not show the full picture either.

Developed countries traditionally see the most expensive single disasters in terms of losses and insurance claims, given their wealthier economies and extensive insurance penetration.

In 2011, for example, when Japan was battered by a massive earthquake and tsunami, estimated global disaster losses rocketed to \$391 billion.

The situation in poorer countries is less clear, notably if a disaster does not strike industrial areas, and because insurance coverage is far less widespread.

"The damage to things that are valued in dollars can be very small. What you have to measure is the loss of livelihoods, of millions of people's livelihoods, fishing boats, their nets, their villages, their houses," said Cannon.

"They are not measured in dollar terms, they're not insured, they're not even counted in the international statistics," he said.

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