

Brazil flooding death toll surpasses 100

May 8 2024, by Mauricio RABUFFETTI



Some 15,000 soldiers, firefighters, police and volunteers are hard at work across Rio Grande do Sul many in boats, even jet skis, to rescue those trapped and transport aid.

The death toll from devastating floods that have ravaged southern Brazil

for days surpassed 100 on Wednesday, authorities said, as the search for dozens of missing people was interrupted by fresh storms.

Some 400 municipalities have been affected by the worst natural calamity ever to hit the state of Rio Grande do Sul, with hundreds of people injured and more than 160,000 forced from their homes.

Many have no access to drinking water or electricity—or even the means to call for help, with telephone and internet services down in many places.

On Tuesday, state governor Eduardo Leite had warned the human toll was likely to rise as "the emergency is continuing to develop" in the state capital of Porto Alegre and other cities and towns.

Some 15,000 soldiers, firefighters, police and volunteers were at work across the state, many in boats and jet skis, to rescue those trapped and transport aid.

But in Porto Alegre the rains returned on Wednesday, halting evacuation efforts.

The mayor's office urged rescue boats to suspend their activities, citing the risk of electric shocks from lightning and strong winds of over 80 kilometers (50 miles) per hour.

Authorities urged people not to return to affected areas due to possible landslide and health hazards.



Nearly 100,000 homes had been damaged or destroyed by unprecedented rains and floods in the state, with losses estimated at about 4.6 billion reais (more than \$900 million).

"Contaminated water can transmit diseases," civil defense spokeswoman Sabrina Ribas warned on Wednesday.

Many people have been loath to leave their homes for the safety of shelters amid reports of abandoned properties being looted.

The National Confederation of Municipalities said about 61,000 homes—down from an earlier estimate of 100,000—had been damaged or destroyed by unprecedented rains and floods in the state, with losses estimated at about 6.3 billion reais (some \$1.2 billion.)

Damage to schools, hospitals and municipal buildings amounted to about \$69 million.

Porto Alegre is home to about 1.4 million people and the larger metropolitan area has more than double that number.

The state's Guaiba River, which runs through Porto Alegre, reached historic levels and five dams are at risk of rupturing, with two of them in "imminent" danger.



Tens of thousands of people were left stranded by impassable roads, collapsed bridges and flooded homes.

'A parallel universe'

There were queues at public taps and wells as officials warned that the most urgent need for people stranded by impassable roads, collapsed bridges and flooded homes was drinking water.

Only two of Porto Alegre's six water treatment plants were functioning, the mayor's office said Tuesday, and hospitals and shelters were being supplied by tankers.

Helicopters were delivering water and food to communities most in need, while work continued on restoring road access.

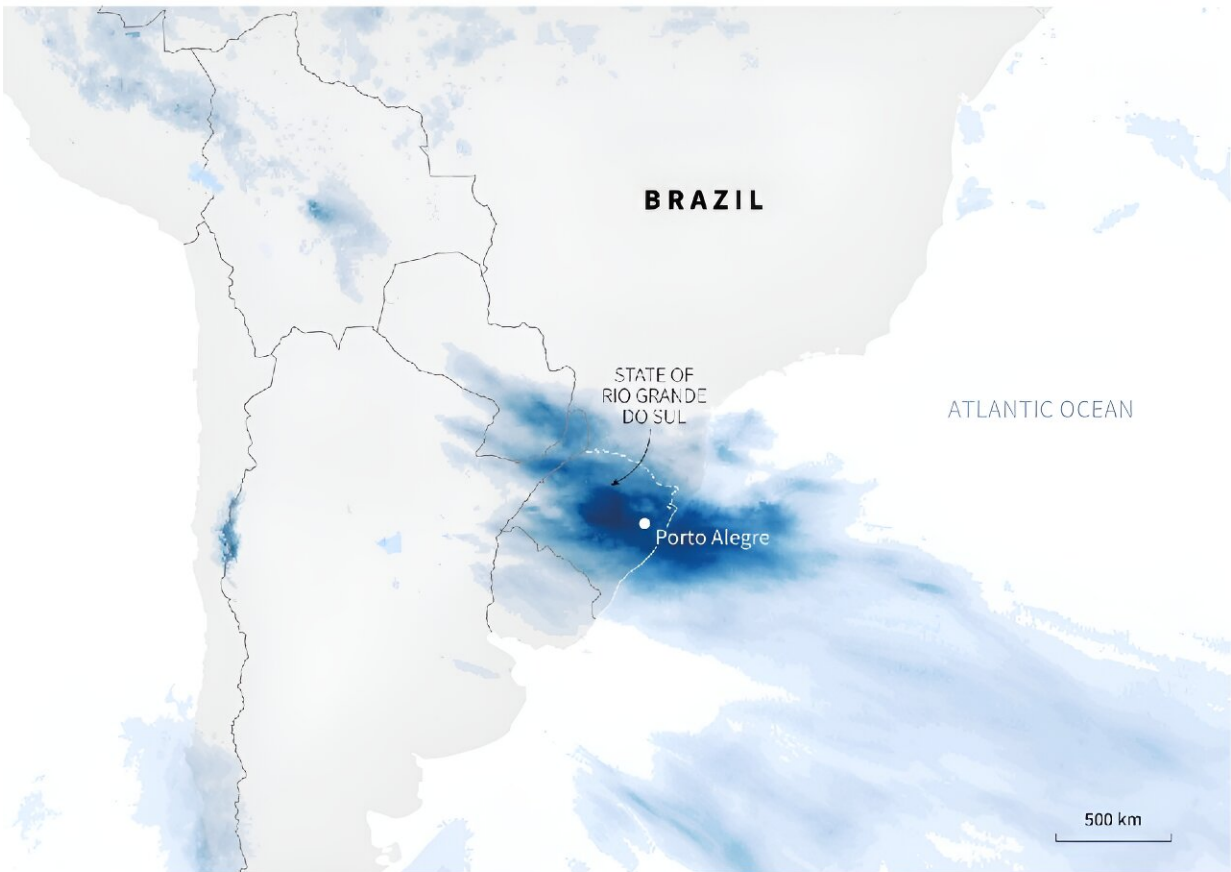
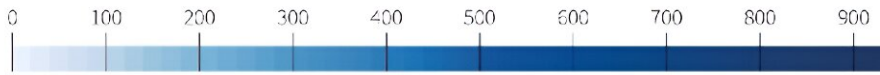
The Brazilian Navy was to send its "Atlantic" vessel—Latin America's largest—to Rio Grande do Sul on Wednesday with two mobile water treatment stations.

President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva has vowed there would be "no lack of resources to meet the needs of Rio Grande do Sul."

In Gasometro, a part of Porto Alegre popular with tourists, the water continued to rise Wednesday, complicating rescue efforts.

Heavy rains leave dozens dead in southern Brazil

Accumulated precipitation between April 27 and May 4, in mm



Source: NASA

AFP 

Map of Brazil locating the state of Rio Grande do Sul, the city of Porto Alegre and the heavy rainfall between April 27 and May 4, which has left dozens dead.

"You can only cross on foot or by boat. There is no other way," 30-year-old resident Luan Pas told AFP next to a street turned into a stagnant, smelly river.

Operations at the port of Porto Alegre have been suspended and its international airport indefinitely closed.

The Air Force said the military base outside town will receive commercial flights transporting aid and passengers.

In a rare dry spot in Porto Alegre's historic center, dozens of people gathered around a generator rented by a pharmacy on Wednesday to charge their cell phones.

"This is a parallel universe," said one of them, university professor Daniela da Silva, 30.

The Inmet meteorological institute has warned of more storms with heavy rains and winds in the south of the state and downpours over the weekend in the Porto Alegre region.



This handout satellite image courtesy of Maxar Technologies taken on May 7, 2024 shows the flooding along the Taquari river in the Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul, following torrential rains that have left at least 95 people dead.

Due to climate change, extreme or rare events "are becoming more frequent and more extreme," Jose Marengo, research coordinator at Brazil's National Center for Natural Disaster Monitoring (Cemaden), told AFP.

The federal government, meanwhile, said it would import 200,000 tons of rice to guarantee supplies and preempt price speculation. The flooded region supplies more than two-thirds of the rice consumed in Brazil.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres extended his condolences in a statement to the people of Brazil, saying that "disasters such as this are a reminder of the devastating effects of the climate crisis on lives and livelihoods."

© 2024 AFP

Citation: Brazil flooding death toll surpasses 100 (2024, May 8) retrieved 1 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2024-05-brazil-death-toll.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.