

Floods strand dozens of tourists in Kenya's Maasai Mara

May 1 2024, by Hillary ORINDE



The makeshift dam burst in the Rift Valley sent torrents of water and mud gushing down a hill.

Nearly 100 tourists were among people marooned after a river overflowed in Kenya's famed Maasai Mara wildlife reserve following a

heavy downpour, a local administrator said Wednesday, as the death toll from flood-related disasters neared 180.

Torrential rains, amplified by the El Niño weather pattern, have lashed much of the East African country and destroyed roads, bridges and other infrastructure.

"Approximately 100 or more tourists" were stranded in more than a dozen lodges, hotels and camps, Narok West sub-county administrator Stephen Nakola told AFP.

"That is the preliminary number as of now because some of the camps are inaccessible," he said.

The world-famous Maasai Mara, in southwestern Kenya, is a tourist magnet and home to [native wildlife](#) including the so-called Big Five—lions, elephants, rhinos, leopards and buffalo—as well as giraffes, hippos and cheetahs.

The Kenya Red Cross said it had rescued more than 90 people from the camps, some of them by air.

"In some camps, tents have been swept away and the Mara bridge, linking the Mara Triangle and the Greater Mara, has been washed away," it said on X, adding later that the floodwaters had "subsided".

Tourism alongside agriculture and diaspora remittances are Kenya's top foreign exchange earners.



Nearly 50 villagers died when the makeshift dam burst in Kenya's Rift Valley.

Revenue from [tourism](#) jumped nearly a third in 2023 over the previous year beating the pre-pandemic numbers, the government said in March.

Tourism minister Alfred Mutua had earlier on Wednesday said "several camps have been impacted" by the downpour and warned all hotels and camps near rivers within Kenyan parks and reserves to prepare "for potential evacuations."

"Develop clear evacuation, transportation, and hospitality protocols," Mutua said.

The directive came hours after President William Ruto deployed the military to evacuate everyone living in flood-prone areas.

People living in the affected areas will have 48 hours to move after those who remain "will be relocated forcibly in the interest of their safety," the cabinet said.

'Early warning systems'

So far, 179 people including 15 children have died in flood-related disasters across Kenya since March, according to government data.

Some 90 people have been reported missing, raising fears that the toll could go higher, and more than 195,000 others displaced.



Flash floods hit the village of Kamuchiri, near Mai Mahiu, where a dam burst on Monday.

In the worst single incident that killed nearly 50 villagers, a makeshift dam burst in the Rift Valley before dawn Monday, sending torrents of water and mud gushing down a hill and swallowing everything in its path.

The tragedy was the deadliest episode in the country since the start of the rainy season.

The disaster has sparked an outpouring of condolences and pledges of solidarity with the affected families from all over the world.

Pope Francis on Wednesday said he conveyed his "spiritual closeness" to Kenyans "at this time when a severe flood has tragically taken the lives of many of our brothers and sisters, injuring others and causing widespread destruction".

"I invite you to pray for all those who are suffering the effects of this natural disaster," he said at a general audience at the Vatican.

The weather has also left a trail of destruction in neighboring Tanzania, where at least 155 people have been killed in flooding and landslides.

El Niño is a naturally occurring climate pattern typically associated with increased heat worldwide, leading to drought in some parts of the world and heavy rains elsewhere.

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