Filipinos to receive disaster alerts on cellphones (Update)

June 27 2014

In this Nov. 10, 2013 file photo, a man walks through debris of houses destroyed by Typhoon Haiyan in Tacloban city, Leyte province, central Philippines. The Philippines has passed a law that requires mobile phone companies to send early warnings to millions of people in the path of deadly typhoons, volcanic eruptions and earthquakes in an effort to reduce high number of fatalities that occur almost every year. The measure, announced Friday, June 27, 2014 was in response to one of the deadliest typhoons ever to make landfall—Typhoon Haiyan, which killed over 6,300 people and displaced 4 million in the central

Philippines last year. (AP Photo/Bullit Marquez, File)

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The Free Mobile Disaster Act, which was signed last week by President Benigno Aquino III but announced only on Friday, directs mobile phone operators to send out alerts about storms, tsunamis or other calamities whenever required by national disaster agencies.

Similar early warning systems are in place in several other countries, including Japan.

The Philippines is hit by about 20 typhoons a year in a region that generates some of the world's strongest tropical cyclones. It also sits along the so-called Pacific Ring of Fire where volcanic activities and earthquakes are common.

The new law says that the alerts should include up-to-date information sent directly to subscribers in or near the area to be hit by a potential calamity. The messages should also include contact information for local governments and other agencies and possibly details such as evacuation or relief sites and pickup points for those fleeing their homes.

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