UNHCR provides emergency assistance to Cyclone Gati victims in Puntland

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, has commenced distribution of humanitarian assistance to thousands of people in Somalia's Puntland region impacted by Cyclone Gati, the strongest tropical cyclone ever recorded in the east African country.

Gati made landfall on 22 November in Puntland’s Bari region, bringing around two-years of rainfall in a just a few days and affecting over 180,000 people, of which some 42,000 were displaced from their homes.

Over the last three and half decades, Somalia has experienced 15 tropical storms and cyclones together with flash floods. Extreme weather events are part of a global pattern of stronger storms caused by climate change and warmer ocean temperatures. Cyclone Gati is resulting in a humanitarian emergency on top of existing crises in a country grappling with conflict, the coronavirus pandemic and an unprecedent upsurge of desert locusts.

“This has been an exceptionally difficult year in Somalia, with compounding emergencies, all of which require urgent attention,” said Johann Siffointe, UNHCR’s Representative in Somalia, “we could quickly respond with emergency relief to the worst affected, thanks to the flexibility of our donors.”

UNHCR is assisting some 36,000 cyclone victims in the hard-hit Bari region with relief items, including mosquito nets, solar lamps, jerry cans, soap, blankets, sleeping mats, kitchen sets and plastic sheets and/or cash transfers for emergency shelter. This emergency response, which follows an appeal by the Puntland regional government requesting humanitarian assistance, is reaching internally displaced people, refugees and members of local host communities.

Working with the World Food Programme and other partners, UNHCR has airlifted supplies from Mogadishu to Bosaso.

Many of those displaced by the cyclone are now returning to damaged or destroyed homes and settlements. The cyclone has also separated families, destroyed livelihoods and increased the risk of gender-based violence.

The world’s vulnerable face some of the worst effects of climate change, including food, water, and land insecurity, and disrupted services necessary for human health, livelihood, settlement, and survival. Invariably, among the most affected are older people, women, children and people with disabilities.

Some 2.6 million people are currently displaced inside Somalia – mainly due to conflict, but increasingly due to climate-related shock such as severe droughts and flooding.

The UNHCR-led Protection Return Monitoring Network (PRMN) in Somalia has recorded nearly 1.3 million new displacements so far this year, more than 70 per cent of which were driven by flooding.

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