Beat: News

Floods in N. Korea destroy thousands of buildings, killing up to 24

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USPA News - Torrential rains in the western region of North Korea have killed up to 24 people and left tens of thousands homeless, the United Nations (UN) reported on Thursday, adding that a major city in the region was flooded with waters up to 2 meters (6.5 feet) deep. The Hydro-meteorological Service in North Korea said it recorded 413 millimeters (16.2 inches) of rainfall in Tongsin County of Chagang province between 9 p.m. on July 19 and 3 p.m. on July 21, making it the worst affected area.

Rainfall in the affected region was nearly twice the average amount of rainfall for the month of July, which marks the start of the annual rainy season. The state-run Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) initially put the death toll at eight, but the United Nations (UN) Country Team in North Korea said Thursday that some reports put the number of deaths as high as 24. At least fourteen people are also believed to be missing, the agency said. "Heavy seasonal rain over the past two weeks has resulted in flooding in many parts of DPR Korea. Particularly severely affected are the provinces of North and South Pyongan," the UN said in a situation report. The government said the floods destroyed more than 4,500 houses across the country, leaving nearly 46,000 people homeless. At least 1,000 houses were destroyed or severely damaged in North Pyongan province, according to government figures, while some 2,300 houses were flooded in the province`s Unsan County alone. The torrential rains this month have also damaged at least 30 schools and 15 hospital buildings across the country. Approximately 80 percent of Anju City, located in South Pyongyang province, is believed to be flooded with flood waters up to 2 meters (6.5 feet) deep, according to the Red Cross. The city was flooded on early Sunday morning when rising waters in the Chongchon River caused embankments to break. "The UN has dispatched assessment teams to some of the areas identified by the government as most badly affected and will be reporting on the damage later today," the UN`s North Korea office said. It added that many roads in Anju City are inaccessible while communication lines and the city`s water supply system have been disrupted. In response to the disaster, local Red Cross disaster response teams have deployed two water treatment units in the worst affected area. They have also worked to mobilize a number of volunteers to assist in rescue operations, evacuations, and the operation of the water purification units. "The local police have been involved in providing rescue services to the affected people," the UN said in its report. It said the North Korean government has provided food and water trucks for drinking water to affected communities, as well as medicine kits which were supplied by the Red Cross last month. Last year, at least 169 people were killed and around 400 others went missing when severe weather hit North Korea on two occasions. At least 88 people were killed by tropical storm Khanun and dozens more died just days later when torrential rains hit the impoverished nation again. The North estimated more than 212,000 people were left homeless, forcing the government to request international assistance. KCNA`s reporting of severe floods in 2011 was heavily criticized after it distributed a photo which appeared to have been digitally altered to make the disaster look worse than it may have been. North Korean state-run media normally keeps quiet or downplays problems in the country, and experts believe the North`s photoshopping may have been an attempt to receive more international aid.

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