

UN says climate change to blame for doubling of disasters over past 20 years

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A flooded village is seen in Quang Tri province, Vietnam, on October 12, 2020. (Photo: Reuters)

United Nations, October 12 (RHC)-- Climate change is largely to blame for a near doubling of natural disasters in the past 20 years, the United Nations says. The UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction said 7,348 major disaster events had occurred between 2000 and 2019, claiming 1.23 lives, affecting 4.2 billion people and costing the global economy some \$2.97 trillion.

The figure far outstrips the 4,212 major natural disasters recorded between 1980 and 1999, the UN office said in a new report entitled "The Human Cost of Disasters 2000-2019." The sharp increase was largely attributable to a rise in climate-related disasters, including extreme weather events like floods, drought and storms, the report said.

Extreme heat is proving especially deadly. "We are willfully destructive," UNDRR chief Mami Mizutori told reporters in a virtual briefing. "That is the only conclusion one can come to when reviewing disaster events over the last 20 years."

She accused governments of not doing enough to prevent climate hazards and called for better preparation for looming disasters. "The odds are being stacked against us when we fail to act on science and early warnings to invest in prevention, climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction," she said.

The report did not touch on biological hazards and disease-related disasters like the coronavirus pandemic, which has killed over one million people and infected over 37 million in the past nine months. But Mizutori suggested coronavirus was "the latest proof that political and business leaders are yet to tune in to the world around them."

Monday's report showed 6,681 climate-linked events had been recorded since the turn of the century, up from 3,656 during the previous 20-year-period. While major floods had more than doubled to 3,254, there had been 2,034 major storms up from 1,457 in the prior period.

Mizutori said public health authorities and rescue workers were "fighting an uphill battle against an ever-rising tide of extreme weather events." While better preparedness and early warning systems had helped bring down the number of deaths in many natural disaster settings, she warned that "more people are being affected by the expanding climate emergency."

The UN report relied on statistics from the Emergency Events Database, which records all disasters that kill 10 or more people, affect 100 or more people or result in a state of emergency declaration.

The data showed that Asia has suffered the highest number of disasters in the past 20 years with 3,068 such events, followed by the Americas with 1,756 and Africa with 1,192.

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