

Iota death toll rises as rescue efforts reveal destruction

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Nicaragua and Honduras bear the brunt of the hurricane's destruction. (Photo: AFP)

Managua, November 19 (RHC)-- Hurricane Iota's death toll in Central America has continued to rise as authorities on Thursday recovered more bodies buried in landslides triggered by flooding that swept through the already waterlogged region earlier this week.

At least 40 people have been killed to date across the region, Reuters News Agency reported, and the toll is expected to rise as rescue workers reach isolated communities. Most of the deaths have been in Nicaragua and Honduras.

Iota made landfall on Nicaragua's coast late Monday as a Category-4 hurricane, the strongest on record to have hit the Central American country, and increased in strength to a Category 5 before weakening as it moved inland.

More than 130 people were killed by Eta as the hurricane triggered flash floods and mudslides in parts of Central America and Mexico. A total of 18 people have been confirmed dead in Nicaragua, Reuters reported on Thursday, but the number could go up as authorities searched for survivors of a landslide in the north of the country.

Reports differed on the landslide's death toll, with Reuters reporting eight deaths and the AFP news agency reporting nine, including six children. "Coming here and finding my daughter dead ... she was my only child, I asked God for a girl and look how it's ended," Orlando Navarrete, father of one of the children, told AFP.

On Thursday morning, Honduran authorities confirmed that eight members of two families, including four children, were killed when a landslide buried their homes in a village in a mountainous region populated by Lencas Indigenous people near the border with El Salvador.

In Honduras, much of the country's industrial heartland in the northern Sula Valley was under water, as it was two weeks ago after Hurricane Eta. Water that had covered houses around the San Pedro Sula airport had begun to subside, however.

Guatemala's President Alejandro Giammattei held an emergency cabinet meeting Thursday to assess the situation in the country, where bridges and roads were destroyed and homes were swept away by floodwaters.

Some 160,000 Nicaraguans and 70,000 Hondurans have been forced to flee to shelters, where aid workers worry the chaotic conditions could lead fresh outbreaks of COVID-19.

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