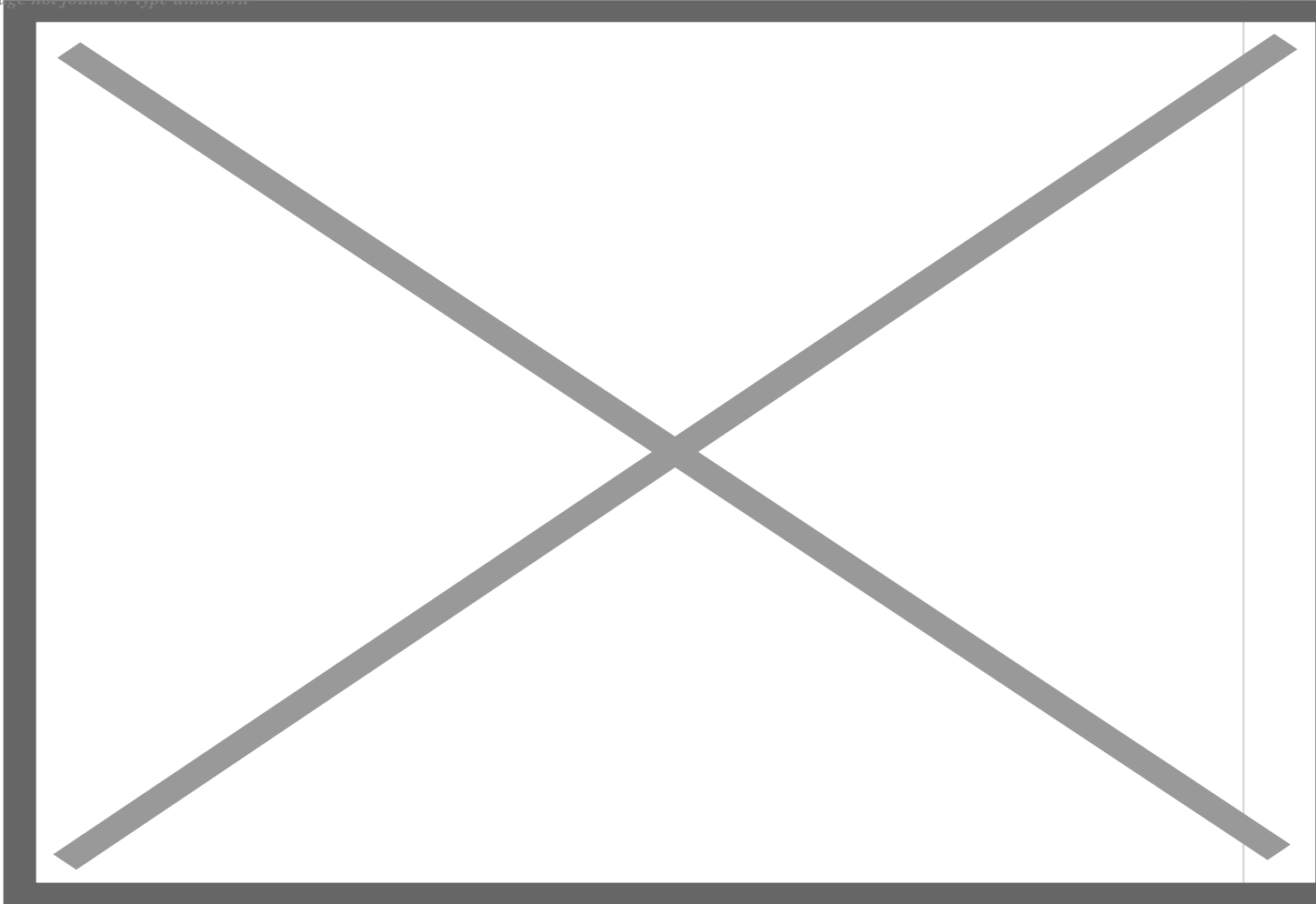


At least 20 killed in Madagascar by Cyclone Batsirai

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A woman sits on the debris of her destroyed house in the town of Mananjary, Madagascar, February 7, 2022 [Alkis Konstantinidis/Reuters]

Mananjary, February 8 (RHC)-- At least 20 people have been killed and more than 55,000 others were displaced after Cyclone Batsirai slammed into Madagascar's eastern coast, officials have said.

The tropical storm weakened quickly as it moved southwest across the island, missing the capital Antananarivo and posing little risk to other areas except for heavy rainfall, the national meteorological department said on Monday.

Batsirai, southern Africa's second biggest cyclone this year, was forecast to dissipate further as it exits Madagascar and should not pose a serious risk to Mozambique, said the weather department. Officials in Madagascar are working to attend to the damage caused by Batsirai.

President Andry Rajoelina went to the town of Mananjary Monday to see the storm's destruction and the relief efforts.

Batsirai destroyed about 3,000 dwellings and government buildings and flooded 5,700 others in Mananjary and nearby towns, officials said. "The first thing the government is doing is to see how to repair and rehabilitate administrative buildings, prioritizing health centers and hospitals," General Elack Andriankaja, director-general of the National Office for Risk and Disaster Management, told The Associated Press news agency.

"Many administrative buildings are completely destroyed in these regions, and in particular in Mananjary," he said.

Madagascar was still picking up the pieces after Tropical Storm Ana affected at least 131,000 people across the island in late January, with most of the 55 deaths coming in Antananarivo. Ana also hit Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, causing dozens of deaths.

The cyclone partly destroyed the main road linking the island's north and south, "which will make it difficult to provide access and reinforcements to villages, including in drought-hit areas," Jean Benoit Manhes, a representative of UN children's agency UNICEF in Madagascar, told AFP news agency. "Madagascar is in a constant humanitarian crisis," he added.

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