

Death toll in devastating Pakistan floods crosses 1,300 mark



Flood victims with their belongings in Sohbatpur in Pakistan's Balochistan province [Amer Hussain/Reuters]

Islamabad, September 5 (RHC)-- At least 25 more people have died overnight in Pakistan where rapidly melting glaciers have submerged more than a third of the South Asian nation. The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) on Monday reported the deaths, pushing the total fatalities in the devastating floods since June to 1314, nearly a third of them (458) being children.

The southern Sindh province remains the worst affected where authorities have reported a total of 522 deaths so far, including 219 children. The record floods have displaced more than 33 million people, with the country now facing the spread of waterborne diseases and other health challenges in the affected regions.

Millions of people remain marooned in the open without proper shelter or food, and are vulnerable to an outbreak of diseases, including diarrhoea, respiratory infection and skin diseases. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) at the weekend estimated that at least 128,000 pregnant women need urgent medical care in Pakistan, with 42,000 of them expected to go into labour in the next three months.

Dr Azra Fazal Pechuho, the health minister of the worst-hit Sindh province, told Al Jazeera the government is trying to provide obstetrics care to pregnant women. “We are registering pregnant women in relief camps. We are aiming for these women to have safe deliveries and ensuring provision of vaccinations and nutritional care,” she said.

Pechuho said reaching the people trapped in the floodwaters is a key challenge since the road infrastructure is badly damaged due to the flooding. The minister said they were expecting an increase in chronic malnutrition in the province due to crop destruction. “Food security will be in jeopardy,” she said.

The World Health Organization last week said more than 6.4 million people were in dire need of humanitarian aid and estimated that almost 900 health facilities have been damaged in the floods.

Abdullah Fadil, the Pakistan representative to the UN children’s agency, UNICEF, said that with the onset of winter in a few weeks, there was a big risk of “many more child deaths.” “There is now a high risk of water-borne, deadly diseases spreading rapidly – diarrhoea, cholera, dengue, malaria. Without adequate sanitation, communities are increasingly having to resort to open defecation, putting them at high risk of contracting diseases,” Fadil told a news conference last week.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Monday visited the flood-hit area of Shahdadkot in Sindh province. “As Pakistan battles one of the worst climate-induced calamities, among the most adversely affected are children,” he tweeted on Sunday.

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