

At least 50 killed as floods sweep DR Congo capital

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Residents gather near a washed-out bridge after flooding on the the River Hululu, which joins the Rver Lubiriha, near Beni, eastern Congo [File: Al-hadji Kudra Maliro/AP]

Kinshasa, December 14 (RHC)-- At least 50 people have been killed in Kinshasa, capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo, after heavy rains triggered floods and caused landslides. "We are already at around 50 deaths and that is not yet final," the city's police chief, Sylvano Kasongo, said on Tuesday.

Once a collection of fishing villages on the banks of the Congo River, Kinshasa has grown into one of Africa's largest megacities with a population of about 15 million. Poorly regulated rapid urbanisation has

made Kinshasa increasingly vulnerable to flash floods after intense rains, which have become more frequent because of climate change.

Arterial roads in the centre of Kinshasa were submerged. Images shared on social media showed a landslide in the hilly Mont-Ngafula district, cutting off Highway 1, which is a key supply route linking the capital with the Atlantic Ocean port of Matadi. Other images showed entire neighbourhoods flooded with muddy water and roads giving way to sinkholes.

“We’ve never seen a flood here on this scale,” Blanchard Mvubu, who lives in Mont-Ngafula, told an AFP reporter at the scene. “I was asleep, and I could feel water in the house ... it’s a disaster. We’ve lost all our possessions in the house, nothing could be saved.”

Close by, a young man was asking for 500 Congolese francs (\$0.24) from passers-by to carry them on his back across the submerged street. Another man, who identified himself as a teacher, was walking barefoot in the water, holding a pair of shoes in one hand and a plastic bag with documents in the other. “I’ve got no other choice,” he said. “I have to give schoolchildren an exam.”

The prime minister and provincial governor were visiting the flooded areas, and local officials were expected to meet representatives of the interior ministry and other state bodies to address the emergency. At least 39 people died in Kinshasa in 2019 when torrential rains flooded low-lying districts and some buildings and roads collapsed.

In addition to damaged infrastructure, each day of flooding in Kinshasa costs households a combined \$1.2m because of the large-scale transportation disruption, according to a 2020 World Bank paper.

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