

Libya continues search for the missing as bodies wash up on its shores

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Tripoli, September 18 (RHC)-- A desperate search for the missing people continues in the Libyan city of Derna, where bodies are still washing up on its shores or decaying under the rubble, a week after Storm Daniel triggered devastating floods in the country's east.

The United Nations said in a report on Sunday that the death toll in Derna alone has risen to 11,300. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) added that 10,100 others were missing in the devastated city.

“These figures are expected to rise in the coming days and weeks as search-and-rescue crews work tirelessly to find survivors,” the OCHA report said.

The revised death toll came as international aid started trickling in, with the UN and countries in Europe and the Middle East offering relief to survivors, including 40,000 people who have been displaced in the wake of the disaster.

The aid includes essential medicines, food, tents, blankets and hygiene kits, as well as heavy machinery to help clear the debris and body bags to allow corpses to be moved.

At Derna’s seafront on Saturday – where a wrecked car could be seen perched on top of concrete storm breakers and driftwood was strewn across muddy pools – diggers worked to clear the path for rescue teams and a helicopter scanned the sea for bodies.

Kamal al-Siwi, the official in charge of the identification of missing people, said more than 450 bodies had been recovered in the past three days from the seashore, including 10 from under rubble. “The work is ongoing and is very, very, very complicated,” he told the Reuters news agency. “This operation, in my opinion, needs months and years.”

The devastating flooding brought by Storm Daniel was exacerbated by poor infrastructure in Libya, which was plunged into turmoil after a NATO-backed uprising toppled and killed longtime ruler Muammar Gaddafi in 2011. In Derna, which has an estimated population of at least 120,000, entire districts were swept away or buried in brown mud after two dams south of the city broke on Sunday night, unleashing torrents of floodwater down a usually dry riverbed.

“We were all taken by surprise. We never expected such a catastrophe,” Derna resident Khalid told Al Jazeera. “I lost my young daughter. May God accept her and have mercy ... we are helpless. God almighty is our rock.”

Turkey-based journalist Nour el-Jebri, who hails from Derna, said dozens of her family members were stuck on the roof of their two-storey house for a whole night as water from the collapsed dams inundated their house.

“It was a very tragic night. They could hear people shouting and screaming ... as the water took them towards the sea. They were helpless,” el-Jebri told Al Jazeera from the Turkish city of Istanbul. “My family is not in a very good mental state.”

The UN humanitarian affairs office has launched an appeal for \$71 million for those affected. The World Health Organization said on Saturday it had flown in enough emergency aid to reach nearly 250,000 people affected by Storm Daniel across eastern Libya, including essential medicines, surgery supplies and body bags for the deceased.

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