

Typhoon Yagi wreaks havoc across Southeast Asia

Robert Campion
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Typhoon Yagi, the strongest storm to hit Southeast Asia this year, has left a trail of destruction through the Philippines, Vietnam, Laos, Thailand and war-torn Myanmar.

At least 670 deaths have occurred in the region with thousands more injured and hundreds of thousands displaced. The toll is likely to rise in the coming days. The storm inundated entire regions already impacted by existing seasonal rainfall, triggering extensive flooding and landslides. Many are now left without access to safe drinking water and sanitation, raising the risk of water-borne diseases.

Yagi was classified as a tropical storm on September 1, a day prior to making landfall over Casiguran, Aurora in the Philippines. It caused 21 deaths with 26 missing, and thousands still displaced this week.

Heading west, it reached its peak over the South China Sea where it was categorised as a Category 5 storm with the highest, 1-minute sustained winds recorded at 260km/h. There are only three other recorded typhoons in the South China Sea that have reached Category 5, the latest being Typhoon Rai in 2021.

The typhoon passed over Hainan in China, killing at least two people and cutting power to more than 800,000 homes. It made landfall in northern Vietnam on September 7, in what was the strongest storm experienced in 30 years. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) about half of the country's 58 provinces were affected—home to 19 million people or approximately 20 percent of the population.

Continuous heavy rainfall until September 12 caused flooding and landslides in the mountainous areas of Bac Giang, Hanoi, Lao Cai, Thai Nguyen, Tuyen Quang and Yen Bai. As of September 16, 292 people

had been reported killed with 38 missing and over 1,900 injured. Over 230,000 homes have been damaged and 380,000 hectares of cropland destroyed.

The Climate Impacts Tracker Asia website reported: “In Phu Tho province, floodwaters swept away part of the Phong Chau Bridge, causing at least 13 people to fall into the Hong River. Severe flooding in Thai Nguyen, Ha Giang and the capital, Hanoi, submerged homes, made roads unusable and forced residents to seek assistance as rising waters reached rooftops. A massive number of people are evacuated from coastal towns.

“This is the worst flood I have seen,” Hanoi resident Tran Le Quyen told the Reuters news agency. “It was dry yesterday morning. Now the entire street is flooded. We couldn't sleep last night.”

Continuing west, Typhoon Yagi struck northern Laos and Thailand, causing four and 42 reported deaths respectively. Thailand's northern provinces of Chiang Rai and Chiang Mai were the worst affected with extensive flooding.

The greatest damage occurred in Myanmar, which has been embroiled in civil war since 2021 between the military junta and militia groups associated with the exiled National Unity Government. Having lost the election in late 2020, the military declared the election “stolen” and seized power in a coup in February 2021.

Before the typhoon, World Food Program (WFP) estimated that 13 million people were already suffering from hunger and 3.4 million were displaced. The latest figures show that in 2022 around 40 percent of Myanmar's population were living below the poverty line.

After Yagi, it is now estimated that 55 million people require humanitarian assistance but many areas are inaccessible owing to security risks and movement

restrictions from the civil war.

According to Myanmar's state-run media, at least 293 people have been killed due to Typhoon Yagi and 89 are missing. All nine of the country's states and regions have been affected, but particularly the eastern states of Shan, Kayah, Kayin and Mon, and the central regions of Mandalay, Magway, Bago and the Ayeyarwaddy Delta.

Approximately 320,000 have been reported displaced owing to widespread destruction of homes due to floods and landslides. Significant damage has also occurred to schools, telecommunications and energy infrastructure and more than 2.7 million acres of agricultural land.

International emergency assistance to victims of the conflict is miniscule. The EU, which has pledged billions to prosecute the US-NATO imperialist war against Russia in Ukraine, announced on Friday that it was issuing €2.2 million in humanitarian aid to the region. The US has only announced just \$1 million in aid to Vietnam.

By way of comparison, a report by the Transnational Institute and Stop Arms Trade in July reveals 426 million euros of EU taxpayer money has been spent on companies arming Israel in its genocide against Palestinians in Gaza. The US has provided \$12.5 billion in military aid.

OCHA, in its mid-year report, stated that only 18 percent of funding for its humanitarian response plans had been reached, owing to increasing conflicts and the suspension of funding by governments. The bulk of its assistance is going to countries impacted by US-led wars including Ukraine, Syria, Afghanistan and occupied Palestine. For those countries severely underfunded, including Myanmar, aid had reached only 12 percent of funding requirements.

In Myanmar, the government in exile and the junta are competing for the limited international aid. According to Human Rights Watch, when Cyclone Mocha hit Myanmar in June last year, the junta failed to warn of the storm's risks to the population and blocked humanitarian aid thereby endangering millions of people.

Typhoon Yagi underscores the continuing rise in severe weather events due to climate change. "Every storm, every flood is a stark reminder of the human cost of climate inaction," said John Aylieff, WFP regional

director for Asia and the Pacific, as the region is witnessing accelerating and higher than average temperatures resulting in extreme weather events.

The Climate Impacts Tracker Asia website commented: "Research shows that storms like Typhoon Yagi are becoming more intense due to human-driven climate change, primarily driven by the burning of coal, oil and gas for energy. Analysis by scientists at ClimaMeter found that tropical depressions near Vietnam are now up to 20 percent wetter and 5 percent windier than in previous decades due to climatic changes."

As with every major disaster, the effects expose the incompatibility of human life with a capitalist system based on exploitation and national rivalry. Without a mobilised and unified movement of the working class internationally based on a socialist perspective, millions more in East Asia will face worsening climate emergencies.



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