

Manila in 'state of calamity'

By [Jim Gomez](#)

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Month's worth of rain in 12 hours unleashes worst floods in 42 years in Philippine capital

Associated Press - MANILA-Many Filipinos managed to save only the clothes on their backs but began to rebuild yesterday as the waters receded from a tropical storm that set off the worst flooding in the Philippine capital in 42 years.

With the death toll at 83 and at least 23 others missing, army troops, police and civilian volunteers plucked dead bodies from muddy flood waters and rescued drenched survivors from rooftops after Tropical Storm Ketsana tore through the northern Philippines a day earlier. Some residents began to clean up as the flood waters receded. Still, many parts of the capital remained flooded. A brief period of sunshine showed the extent of the devastation in many neighbourhoods - destroyed houses, overturned vehicles, and roads covered in debris and mud.

Ketsana dumped more than a month's worth of rain in just 12 hours, causing the government to declare a "state of calamity" in metropolitan Manila and 25 storm-hit provinces. The declaration allowed officials to use emergency funds for relief and rescue.

The rains swamped entire towns and set off landslides. Garbage-choked drains and waterways, along with a high tide, compounded the flooding, officials said.

Governor Joselito Mendoza, of Bulacan province, north of the capital, said it was tragic that "people drowned in their own houses."

In the GTA, members of the Filipino community anxiously waited to hear from family back home yesterday after hearing about the storm, the *Star's* Carmen Chai reports.

Guen Guray was scared she wouldn't see her children again when she turned on the television.

"Watching everything, it was really terrible," Guray said. "I was crying, thinking I can't really be a mother if I don't know what's going on in the Philippines."

Corazon Clarete, another GTA mother with children in the Philippines, was just as concerned. "We are so worried. I'm always on the Internet looking for more news even though my kids are okay."

Her daughter-in-law's relatives were not so lucky, though. They fled their home in Marikina, a suburb of Manila, leaving all their belongings behind. "They didn't even take clothes to the evacuation centre."

In Ottawa, a spokesperson for Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada said it has been contacted by Canadians who have been affected by the flooding and that embassy officials in Manila are also continuing to offer assistance.

More than 330,000 people were affected by the storm, including 59,000 people who were brought to about 100 schools, churches and other evacuation shelters, officials said. Troops, police and volunteers have so far been able to rescue more than 5,100 people, Defence Secretary Gilbert Teodoro said.

The 42.4 centimetres of rain that swamped Manila in just 12 hours Saturday exceeded the 39.2-centimetre average for all of September, chief government weather forecaster Nathaniel Cruz said.

"We're back to zero," said Ronald Manlangit, a resident of Marikina.

Flood waters engulfed the ground floor of his home and swamped his TV set and other prized belongings. Still, he expressed relief he managed to move his children to the second floor.

"If the water rose farther, all of us in the neighbourhood would have been killed."

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