

Are Rising Temperatures to Blame for Typhoon Haiyan?

From VOA Learning English, this is In the News.

The Philippine government is defending its efforts to get assistance to victims of Typhoon Haiyan. Many have received little or no assistance since the storm struck a week ago. Interior Secretary Mar Roxas said Friday in the city of Tacloban that the need is massive, immediate and not everyone can be reached.

The aircraft carrier USS George Washington and other US Navy ships arrived in the Philippines this week to help with disaster relief operations. The ships brought helicopters and emergency aid.

The Navy is deploying the helicopters to inspect damage from Typhoon Haiyan. The aircraft are also being used to transport supplies to affected communities. The aircraft carrier also has medical services and can produce 1.5 million liters of fresh water a day.

The storm displaced hundreds of thousands of people. The country's chief of disaster relief said Friday that at least 3,600 people are known to have died.

The amount of food and other aid sent to the Philippines has increased in recent days. But moving the aid from airports or other areas has been a slow process, in part because wreckage blocks many roads.

Scientists say Typhoon Haiyan was one of the strongest storms on record ever to hit land. Some people wonder whether man-made climate change played a part in the typhoon. Bob Ward is with the Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change at the London School of Economics.

“There’s certainly strong circumstantial evidence because we know that the strength of tropical cyclones, hurricanes, typhoons, depends very much on sea surface temperatures. They act as the fuel. And we’ve got very warm waters in the Pacific at the moment, which have been increasing because of climate change, and those very warm waters are what powered this typhoon.”

Bob Ward says the intensity of storms seems to be increasing.

“Our models are not very clear at the moment. But we might expect in the future that we might even see fewer, but those that do occur will be much stronger than we’re experiencing now.”

Benedict Dempsey is with the aid group Save the Children. He says detailed weather predictions meant that some aid workers were already in place when the storm hit.

“Half a dozen people went into the path of the storm in order to be prepared for the response in Tacloban and elsewhere in the Philippines.”

He says aid agencies are learning to prepare for natural disasters of this kind.

“Between around 2002 and 2011, on average over 260 million people a year are being affected by disasters. And so we’re seeing the reality of these trends acting out on the ground, and it’s absolutely something that we’re having to prepare to respond to in the future.”

Benny Peiser is director of the Global Warming Policy Foundation. His group questions whether human activities are to blame for rising temperatures. He says people should be concerned about disaster preparation instead of cutting gases linked to climate change.

“This was the 20th tropical storm to have hit the Philippines this year. So this is going to continue no matter what we decide on CO₂, these storms will continue.”

Climate change talks are taking place in Warsaw, Poland. At the talks, the Philippine representative appealed for an agreement to cut industrial gases like carbon dioxide. Scientist Bob Ward says the delegates should pay close attention.

“I think this typhoon will focus minds very much on the fact that if we squabble and delay in getting an agreement, we’re going to see more and more of these kind of events with very, very severe human costs.”

But observers at the Warsaw talks say a deal on cutting greenhouse gases still appears to be far away.

And that’s In the News, from VOA Learning English. I’m Bob Doughty.