

Situation Overview

Taal Volcano, located in the CALABARZON region 70 km south of the capital Manila, continues to actively erupt, emitting dark gray ash plumes up to 800 metres high. Activity in the last 24 hours has generally waned to a weak emission of steam-laden plumes 700 metres high that dispersed ash to the southwest, according to The Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (PHIVOLCS).

New fissures or cracks to the south west of the Taal Lake shoreline were observed in the municipalities of Lemery, Agoncillo, Talisay and San Nicolas in the province of Batangas, with a fissure transecting a road connecting Agoncillo to Laurel, Batangas. Five hundred twenty volcanic earthquakes have been recorded since 12 January and such intense seismic activity probably signifies continuous magmatic intrusion beneath the Taal edifice, which may lead to further eruptive activity, according to PHIVOLCS.

Alert level-4 remains in effect and communities residing within a 14-km radius of the volcano crater are most at risk, including parts of the densely populated tourist destination Tagaytay City. National authorities continue to evacuate communities to safety from fourteen municipalities in Batangas: Agoncillo, Alitagtag, Balete, Cuenca, Laurel, Lemery, Lipa, Malvar, Mataas na Kahoy, San Nicolas, Sta. Teresita, Taal, Talisay and Tanauan, while police authorities are restricting access to Agoncillo, Lemery, San Nicolas, Talisay and Taal in Batangas, only allowing residents to gather belongings for a limited amount of time. Road clearing continues and access from Tagaytay City to Tanauan, Batangas via Talisay is now accessible.

Until Alert level-4 is lowered, PHIVOLCS recommends a strict evacuation protocol of those in the 14 km-radius danger zone and a permanent relocation of Taal Island residents. As of 16 January, over 68,600 people are affected in Batangas and Cavite province, of whom more than 57,200 people have been assisted and taking shelter in 257 evacuation centres according to national figures. Save the Children estimates that around 21,000 children living in the 14-kilometer danger zone were among the affected, while the Department of Education reported that over 8 million children from nearly 7,900 schools were affected by the disruption of classes over the past few days, as well as schools that closed or sustained damage due to ashfall in affected municipalities.

Government response and support of humanitarian partners

National and provincial authorities continue to lead the response, coordinating logistics support, evacuating affected barangays (villages), clearing roads and dredging waterways clogged with ashfall. The Department of Social Welfare and Development is leading food, relief distribution and cash assistance, providing nearly PhP4 million (US\$78,690) worth of assistance as of 16 January. The Department of Health is conducting health assessments and providing face masks and medical assistance, while the Philippine army and police force continue to facilitate the evacuation of those in the 14-km danger zone via their transportation assets. Nearby local governments of Quezon and Laguna province are also providing support, while municipalities in Batangas and Cavite are hosting displaced communities from other municipalities and provinces. An emergency operations centre has been stood up at the Batangas Provincial Sports Complex in Batangas City.

The provinces of Batangas and Cavite have declared a state of calamity, enabling them to tap locally budgeted emergency funding. Agricultural damages are estimated to be at Php577 million (US\$11.3 million) affecting 2,772 hectares of farm land and 1,967 animal heads. The most affected crops are rice, corn, coffee, cacao, banana and combined with the estimated production loss of over 15,000 metric tonnes in the fisheries sector may affect food security.

The focus of the regional government is the ongoing evacuation of those who were left behind in the initial round of mandatory evacuation. Maritime assets are not able to enter the lake surrounding the volcano, posing a problem to over thousands of animals and livestock located in the Taal Island.

Humanitarian organizations are conducting assessments in affected municipalities as well as in host communities in Batangas and Cavite, and have identified the need to support those who have fled to safety in evacuation centres and host communities who may remain in displacement for a considerable period of time. Water, sanitation and hygiene supplies, sleeping kits and health assistance were reported as initial priority needs. It was also observed that some 180 schools are used as evacuation centres and the Department of Education has requested public schools in the CALABARZON region to accommodate displaced learners and for teachers to validate the number of school-age children to facilitate their registration at the host schools.

The Humanitarian Country Team, composed of in-country UN agencies, INGOs and NGOs and the private sector, stands in solidarity with the Philippines and is coordinating with their government counterparts to support priority needs in relief assistance. The United Nations, together with its humanitarian partners, is assisting with technical and logistical needs of local and regional authorities and stands ready to provide further assistance if needed.

For more information, contact:

Mark Bidder, Head of Office, bidder@un.org

Gina Maramag, Public Information Officer, maramag@un.org