

Beat: Local

Flash floods kill 123, leave scores missing in northern Afghanistan

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USPA News - Flash floods triggered by torrential rains have destroyed more than 3,000 houses in northern Afghanistan, killing at least 123 people and leaving more than 150 others missing, officials said on early Saturday. The full extent of the disaster was not yet clear.

Jowzjan and Faryab provinces, both bordering Turkmenistan, appeared to be the worst affected regions by the flash floods, which followed heavy rainfall that began on Thursday. Flash floods were reported in 23 districts across six provinces, namely Jowzjan, Faryab, Sar-e Pol, Balkh, Samangan, and Takhar. Aidan O'Leary, the head of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in Afghanistan, said provincial governments had reported 123 fatalities by late Friday evening. He said at least 80 people died in Jowzjan province, 33 died in Faryab province, and 10 more died in Sar-e Pol province. But the full extent of the damage and casualties remained unclear, with locals in the Qush Tepa district of Jowzjan province alone reporting that as many as 150 people were still missing. A situation report from OCHA said at least 700 houses, 250 shops and 120 gardens were destroyed in the province, displacing more than 6,000 people. Authorities in Jowzjan province indicated an immediate need for search-and-rescue assistance and heavy machinery to unblock flood canals. Two Afghan National Army helicopters were already airlifting flood-trapped people from rooftops but their capacity was insufficient, OCHA said. At least 2,309 houses were destroyed and a large amount of agricultural land was affected in neighboring Faryab province, where the government reported at least 33 dead and seven missing. At least 1,750 people were affected in the district of Khwaja Sabz Posh, but the number is believed to be higher in other parts of the province. "As assessments are underway to determine the full extent of the damage caused, as well as the humanitarian needs of the affected population, it is still too early to get a full picture of the scale of the flooding," OCHA said in its report. "Limited access to some of the more heavily affected areas remains a key challenge. Priority needs at present include clean drinking water, medical supplies, food, non-food items and shelter." Seasonal rains and spring snow melt regularly results in devastating flash floods in northern Afghanistan, which is at a high risk for such disasters due to its geographical location and environmental degradation. Flash floods crashing down mountains in Kabul province in August 2013 killed more than 80 people.

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