Ensuring those affected by floods in Timor-Leste have access to dignified and safe solutions

The Government of Timor-Leste declared a state of emergency in Dili on 8 April 2021 following severe flooding. This disaster worsened the situation of thousands of families in the capital and surrounding low-lying areas, coming on top of the consequences of and challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Secretariat of State for Civil Protection is leading the humanitarian response, supported by UN entities and development partners.

UN Volunteers in Timor-Leste were at the heart of the humanitarian mission, supporting displaced communities. Heavy rains in early April had caused flash floods that affected the livelihoods of over 25,700 households in 13 municipalities across the country.

UN Volunteers Kathryn Castiloo (United States), Suleiman Okoth (Kenya) and Silveriro dos Santos Correia (Timor-Leste) serve with UNFPA. They have
been on the frontlines of supporting those seeking refuge in evacuation centers in Dili, which cater to over 10,000 displaced people.

Kathryn Castiloo serves as a Programme Specialist on gender-based violence. She has been using her technical expertise to ensure that the women and girls who have affected by the floods have access to information, services and the supplies needed to deal with the situation in dignity and safety.

The heroism and dedication of the UN Volunteers was highly appreciated by UN partners and the affected population. UNFPA Resident Representative Ronny Lindstrom commended the significant efforts the UN Volunteers made during the crisis.

"Kathryn has been challenged by having to work in a difficult situation in terms of safety, as well as with limited resources, such as poor internet," Mr Lindstrom says. "She has been able to use her technical know-how and dedication to make sure that the quality of the response to gender-based violence in times of crisis follows internationally-established standards. Kathryn has been an invaluable addition to the team during this time of emergency and has done a great job."

UN Volunteer Suleiman Okoth serves as a Communication and Programme Support Specialist with UNFPA. He has been instrumental in creating awareness around the emergency. "Suleiman is proactive and creative, and these skills have made a huge impact on the ability of the office to communicate well," Mr Lindstrom shares. "This, by extension, helps in drawing attention to the emergency we are facing, in a country that is often not at the centre of world attention. Through his work, he is able to engage effectively with different teams in the office and provides support to all of our work.

Giving a voice to the many victims of the flash floods disaster in Timor-Leste, while capturing their experiences and needs, goes a long way in mobilizing effective support from governments, humanitarian organizations and audiences to help displaced families to restore their lives. --Mr Ronny Lindstrom, UNFPA Resident Representative in Timor-Leste
"I am humbled to have been able to share information that is critical in humanitarian crisis response to save lives and restore dignity, and support the communities at the centre of the crisis," Suleiman says.

Fellow volunteer, Silveri dos Santos Correia serves as a national Communications Assistant with UNFPA. He has enabled the team to connect with the local population to ensure high-quality communication messages.

"Silvero is a dedicated team player who puts in a 100 per cent effort to further the work of the office, and he is extremely appreciated by colleagues," says Mr Lindstrom. "His contribution to the communications and functioning of the office in this challenging situation, both in terms of the flash floods emergency, as well as the increasing threat of COVID 19, has been invaluable."

The UN meanwhile, has reiterated its continued support to the people and Government of Timor-Leste, as the country recovers from the floods amidst COVID-19 pandemic and travel restrictions. The coordinated efforts are assisting in the identification and overall management of the evacuation facilities, evacuation and transportation of vulnerable groups, and provision of essential health and other services.

- COVID-19 • Coronavirus

Sustainable Development Goal: SDG 13: Climate change SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals