

Headline: Philippines is 3rd most disaster-prone country, new study shows

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After Pacific countries Tonga and Vanuatu, the Philippines ranks as the third most disaster-prone country in the world because of its high exposure to natural calamities, a new international report showed.

The World Disaster Report 2012, released in Brussels on Oct. 11, also said that the Philippines could spare up to 20 million of its people—about a fifth of its total population—from natural disasters by improving the protection of its coral reefs, a primary line of defense against coastal hazards, including tsunamis.

Tropical and coastal nations led the list of 15 countries at high risk for disasters, “owing to their proximity to the sea...(that) exposes (them) to the natural hazards of cyclones, flooding and sea level rise,” read the report.

The report's list of the top 15 most-at-risk nations included Guatemala, Bangladesh, Solomon Islands, Costa Rica, Cambodia, Timor-Leste, El Salvador, Brunei Darussalam, Papua New Guinea, Mauritius, Nicaragua and Fiji.

Adaptation measures

Although third in the list, the Philippines had the best rating on adaptation measures, with scores similar to that of Malaysia and Thailand, which ranked 91st and 92nd, respectively.

The report, a collaboration among the United Nations University's Institute for Environment and Human Security (UNU-EHS), the German Alliance for Development Works (Alliance) and the US-based environment group The Nature Conservancy, rated the disaster risk of 173 countries using “globally available data” on their individual exposure and susceptibility to disasters, as well as their coping and adaptive capacities in the event of natural calamities.

Apart from an overall rating, the report also released the countries' scores in five indicators: Disaster exposure, vulnerability, susceptibility, lack of coping capacities and lack of adaptive capacities.

“The top 15 most at-risk nations are all tropical and coastal, where coastal habitats like reefs and mangroves are incredibly important for people's lives and livelihoods. Reefs, for example, can reduce wave energy approaching coasts by more than 85 percent,” The Conservancy said in a statement posted on its website.

The report noted how disaster preparedness and mitigation and adaptation measures implemented by governments could reduce risk, and cited the Netherlands for its highly developed coping and adaptation measures.

Lowest-risk countries

African and Latin American countries also made up the riskiest half of the list, while Middle Eastern, European and North American countries were rated among the low-risk nations. Malta and Qatar were rated as the two lowest-risk countries.

The study further noted the increasing incidence of natural disasters through man-made environmental degradation and climate change. The report said some 4,130 natural disasters were recorded from 2002 to 2011, leaving more than a million victims and an economic loss of roughly \$1.195 trillion.

“So far, people have rarely been the direct triggers of such disasters. But with their devastating interventions in nature, they have massively raised the hazard potential,” the report said.

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“The destruction of mangrove forests and coral reefs, for example, off the coasts of Southeast Asia, has reduced protection against tidal waves and flooding,” it added.