



International Medical Corps' team meets with officials from the Municipal Social Welfare and Development Office (MSWDO) at the Bauan Evacuation Center.

FAST FACTS

- PHIVOLCS has reduced the alert level status for the Taal Volcano to Level 3.
- Residents living outside of the 4.3-mile danger zone can now return to their homes, though many homes are no longer safe to inhabit.

SITUATION AT A GLANCE

- Priority needs include nonfood items, including hygiene/dignity kits, WASH items for evacuation centers and relocation sites, and mental health and psychosocial support.

SITUATION UPDATE

On January 26, the Philippines Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (PHIVOLCS) lowered the alert status of the **Taal Volcano** from Alert Level 4 to Alert Level 3 to reflect the overall decrease in volcanic activity. Alert Level 3 means that there is a decreased tendency toward hazardous explosive eruption, but volcanic activity has not ceased. The volcano continues to produce weak steam emissions of white to dirty-white plumes. The Philippines Seismic Network (PSN) has reported a total of 763 volcanic earthquakes since January 12. Of those, 177 registered with magnitudes of M1.2–M4.1 and were felt at intensities from I–V on the Mercalli scale.

With the decreased level of alert, residents living outside of the 4.3-mile (7 km) danger zone can now return to their homes. However, access to the Agoncillo and Laurel communities and to Batangas province remains restricted, and Taal Island remains on permanent lockdown. Those returning to their homes are finding their structures insecure or heavily damaged, and are opting to work at their homes during the day and return to the evacuation centers at night. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) reports that more than 384,000 people were affected by the volcano's eruption, with more than 308,000 people temporarily seeking shelter in evacuation centers and host communities.

With regards to infrastructure, nine road sections had been reported as closed due to damage and/or debris. As of January 28, the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) reported that five of those road sections have been cleared and are now open to traffic, while four remain closed due to their location within the evacuation zone. The NDRRMC also reports that all reported areas have had power and water supply restored in impacted areas.¹

¹ National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council. "Situational Report No. 5 re Taal Volcano Eruption. 29 January 2020, 6:00p." Retrieved on January 30, 2020, from https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Update_SitRep_no_50_Taal_Volcano_Eruption_as_of_29_January_2020_6PM.pdf

The volcanic activity comes on the heels of **Typhoon Phanfone** (known locally as Typhoon Ursula), which made landfall on December 24, 2019. As of January 10, more than 2.3 million people have been affected by the typhoon, including at least 38,860 individuals who were displaced. Over the past month, the number of people taking shelter in the temporary evacuation centers has declined. As of January 29, the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) reported that there is only one family taking temporary shelter in one evacuation center in Region VI.² However, an estimated 26,400 people are staying with family and friends. As residents outside of the evacuation zone return home, the number of damaged homes reported continues to rise. The DSWD has reported that, so far, 516,885 homes have been recorded as having suffered damage in the storms.

In response to the disasters, the national government is leading recovery efforts, in partnership with the Philippine Red Cross and other governmental departments.

INTERNATIONAL MEDICAL CORPS RESPONSE

Following Typhoon Phanfone, International Medical Corps deployed a team to affected areas, including Eastern Visayas, to begin meeting with national and local partners to assess urgent needs and provide technical support in response to the disaster. International Medical Corps also has scaled up its operations to support the increased needs attributed to the eruption of the Taal Volcano. Additional staff, including logistics specialists, have been deployed to the Philippines to support increased activities and assist with the distribution of non-food items (including face masks), and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) supplies.

On January 29, the team traveled to the Batangas Incident Command Center, which is located in the Batangas Provincial Sports Complex. The complex has also been serving as an emergency shelter for residents evacuated from the danger zone. At the time of the team's visit, there were 245 families (1,036 individuals) taking shelter there. Before decrease in the alert level, more than 350 families (1,506 individuals) were sheltering in the complex. While at the complex, the team met with the head of the Incident Command Center, Dr. Rosalie Masangkay, who is also the Provincial Health Officer for the region. She estimated that about 60% of the people who had been taking shelter in evacuation centers have returned to their homes, including individuals from the six municipalities that were previously under lockdown (Lemery, Taal, San Nicolas, Agoncillo, Laurel and Talisay). Staff at the complex noted that the families who have remained at the shelter are either afraid that there may be an eruption or they are still cleaning/repairing their homes. The staff expects the number of people in evacuation centers will continue to decline over the weekend, as many homes have been cleaned and the local government has cleared them for occupancy.



The Batangas Provincial Sports Complex, which has been acting as an emergency shelter for families affected by Typhoon Phanfone and the Taal Volcano.

Additionally, the International Medical Corps team met with the Department of Health's assessment team, which is conducting evaluations of health facilities in the six municipalities mentioned above. So far, the assessment team has visited Lemery and Taal, noting that there is no damage to the medicines in these facilities and that water systems are functional. However, additional support is needed to clean the facilities before they can reopen.

² Department of Social Welfare and Development. "DSWD DROMIC Report #29 on Typhoon "Ursula" as of 29 January 2020, 6 p.m." Retrieved on January 30, 2020, from <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/requestursula29jan.pdf>



The Relief Operations and Command Center for Taal evacuees, at the Bauan Evacuation Center.

In addition to meeting with personnel at the Batangas Incident Command Center, International Medical Corps' team traveled to the Bauan Evacuation Center to meet with officials from the Municipal Social Welfare and Development Office (MSWDO). There are currently 86 families (288) individuals at the Evacuation Center, which held 790 families (3,176 individuals) a few weeks ago. Though many of the families have departed for the designated relocation sites, staff from MSWDO noted that many internally displaced persons (IDPs) are returning to the evacuation center, complaining that the relocation sites lack access to basic WASH facilities and electricity.

rural health units in Talisay and Taal, which are located just south of the Taal Volcano and which recently became accessible as the danger zone buffer was reduced. When the alert level was lowered to Level 3 on January 26, health personnel returned to both facilities to begin assessing damage and preparing to resume operations. The health facility in Taal has been inspected and was confirmed as safe for operations; however, the unit in Talisay is not yet operational. Staff in Talisay are still clearing ash and debris, and plan to be operational by next week.

The Taal unit reported that the majority of patients are presenting with respiratory diseases—including asthma and colds—and injuries. Given the increase in respiratory illnesses, personnel noted a need for additional medicines, including anti-asthma medications, analgesics, anti-hypertensive and anti-diabetes medications. International Medical Corps, with support from our partners, distributed hygiene kits, essential medicines and 200 rotary water survival boxes to support local healthcare facilities and communities.

Additionally, as residents continue to return home, there is a concern about providing essential healthcare services to remote areas. This is particularly pressing, as the Talisay rural health unit was understaffed before the disasters. The unit's birthing facility had not been operational for more than three months, due to lack of personnel. Given the increased needs and the continued plumage and ashfall from the volcano, critical medical personnel will be needed to support communities.

Moving forward, International Medical Corps will continue to meet with key stakeholders and identify strategies to support the needs as the disaster moves from emergency to the recovery phase.



International Medical Corps' team meets with officials from the Taal Local Government Unit Office to discuss efforts to resume government services and reopen schools in the district.