

## 55,000 people evacuated ahead of floods

MAPUTO, MOZAMBIQUE: Mozambique authorities on Tuesday (22 January) started emergency evacuations in the flood-stricken south where 55,000 people are said to be in immediate danger from rising water levels.

"We are asking people to move to safer areas. We estimate there are 55,000 people affected," a spokeswoman for Mozambique's Disaster Relief Management Institute, Rita Almeida, told *AFP*.

Emergency teams are already in place and motorboats have been dispatched to the area to take people to safe ground.

The south and the centre of the country have been placed on red alert after experiencing the heaviest rainfalls seen since devastating floods killed around 800 people in 2000.

The latest downpours have already killed 35 people since the start of the rainy season in October and eight major rivers are above crisis levels.

Experts predict that the southern town of Chokwe, which saw water levels rise to roof level in previous floods, could again bear the brunt of the floods.

"The situation is critical," said Elidio Jamisse, a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) advisor to Mozambique's emergency response service.

"The Massingir dam on the Elephants (Olifants) river (a tributary of the Limpopo) is already flowing at 3,500 cubic metres per second," he said. "This water will join the water from the Limpopo and pour down towards Chokwe."

Water levels in areas to the north of the town, have risen by 11 metres.

Between Sunday (20 January) to Monday (21 January) almost 185mm of rain poured over the Limpopo River basin in southern Gaza, where the most vulnerable communities live.

Figures from the Mozambican National Water Directorate on Tuesday (22 January) showed that the south-eastern town of Panda received some 233mm of rain in the past two days.

International organisations are preparing for the worst-case scenario. "There is a big dyke in Chokwe that is giving problems. They are afraid if that dyke breaks, all those people will have to move rapidly," World Food Programme country head Lola Castro told *AFP*.

She said people will be housed in ten temporary accommodation centres.

Rains in neighbouring countries also swelled rivers, and authorities opened the sluices from two dams in the south to lower water levels. Coastal Mozambique is home to nine international river basins, making it especially vulnerable to flooding.

Although it has stopped raining in most areas, the risk of flooding remains high as water flows down the Limpopo towards the sea.

Source: *AFP* via I-Net Bridge

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