

## How Urban Sprawl Intensified Floods in the Philippines

*Nate Berg*

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Unchecked development and rapidly growing informal settlements in metropolitan Manila have exacerbated the devastation of the recent flooding in the Philippines, according to a UN official.

[Speaking with The Philippine Star](#), Margareta Wahlström, chief of the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, notes that the growing numbers of people living on unsuitable land in Manila put them directly in the path of the massive but not unexpected flooding that happens during the summer monsoon season.

"As the urban sprawl of rapid urbanization expands outwards and upwards, it provides ready opportunities for hazards such as floods, storms and earthquakes to wreak havoc," Wahlström said. "Urban floods will represent the lion's share of total flood impact because of infrastructure, institutions and processes that are not yet up to the task ahead."

[This report from CNN](#) says that 60 people have died, 3,100 homes have been damaged, and more than 2.4 million people in 144 municipalities have been impacted by the heavy rains falling over the past five days. The UN says that millions of slum dwellers were among those in metro Manila forced to evacuate their homes, though no clear numbers are available.

Floodplains and vulnerable lands are commonly used as informal settlements. It's unclear how many slum dwellers currently live in metro Manila, but [this 2003 report from UN-Habitat](#) estimated the population at 2.5 million. That's about 20 percent of the metro area's roughly 12 million people – a figure that has [more than doubled](#) [PDF] since 1980. According to the UN report, most of these slum dwellers live along rivers, near garbage dumps and railroad tracks, under bridges and next to industrial sites. "Although there are relatively large slum communities," the report notes, "the settlement pattern of the Metro Manila urban poor is generally dispersed, located wherever there is space and opportunity."

In 2010, officials from the World Health Organization [warned](#) that Manila was growing "fast and randomly" and that the rapidly increasing slum populations would pose significant health risks. Insufficient infrastructure would continue to lead to disease outbreaks, in addition to leaving millions vulnerable to natural disasters.

Informal settling and unplanned floodplain development will continue to pose risks for large segments of the population in Manila. As highlighted in [a 2012 report](#) from the Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery, rapidly expanding cities like Manila will have to more formally control the use of land in these disaster-prone areas to prevent the widespread personal and economic devastation wrought by these recurring floods.

*Nate Berg is staff writer at The Atlantic Cities. He lives in Los Angeles*