

# Thai cave boys spared thundershower forecasts, highlights extreme climate disruption: UN weather agency

Thundershowers that have been forecast in northern Thailand luckily did not materialize, easing the extraordinary rescue of a boys' football team and their coach, who spent well over two weeks trapped in a cave complex there, UN weather experts said on Tuesday.

Clare Nullis, spokesperson for the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), was speaking in Geneva amid reports indicating that all 12 boys and their coach had been freed in a daring rescue operation by a team of specialist divers.

"It is the start of the monsoon season in Thailand," she said. "I've been looking at the weather forecast there for Chiang-Rai, for the region, every day for the past week. Every day it has consistently shown the risk of thundershowers; now they haven't, fortunately, materialized."

Commenting on several other extreme weather events around the world, Ms. Nullis noted that in Japan, flash floods across the country had claimed at least 150 lives, according to authorities, and that the toll "is likely to rise" in coming days.

The situation is significant given Japan's high level of preparedness against natural catastrophes, the WMO spokesperson said, noting that around 10,000 houses have been inundated or destroyed by the worst flooding in decades.

"Japan is one of the best prepared countries in the world when it comes to disaster risk reduction, disaster response – they are supremely well prepared," said Ms. Nullis. "So, the magnitude of the casualties, of the destruction we are seeing now, really is an indication of just how big and how extreme this was and how heavy the rainfall was in such a short period of time."

Among the areas affected between 28 June and 8 July, West Japan and Hokkaido experienced record rainfall, the WMO spokesperson said, citing the Japan Meteorological Agency (JMA).

This was caused by huge amount of water vapour from a stationary rainy front, in addition to damp air left over from Typhoon Prapiroon, JMA said.

Elsewhere in Japan, a different weather system, Typhoon Maria, has hit the south-west Ryukyu islands.

The storm has put nearby Taiwan, Province of China, on "lockdown", the WMO spokesperson said, noting that at its peak in recent days, Maria had developed into a category 5 storm.

Although it has weakened to a category 3 event, Ms. Nullis said that it is still capable of sustained winds of 175 kilometres per hour and gusts of up to 250 kilometres per hour.

“Taiwan is basically in lockdown today and Taiwan is expecting really to take the brunt of this. The China Meteorological Administration has issued a red alert and is ... mobilizing all its emergency response teams.”

The west coast of the United States is also in the grip of “high-impact weather” systems, Ms. Nullis continued, noting record temperatures in downtown Los Angeles:

“Los Angeles area just set a whole new string of temperature records last week,” she said. “Just for an example, 48.9° (Celsius), which is 120° Fahrenheit, in Chino, which is a suburb of Los Angeles; 47.8° in San Bernardino.”

Turning to Europe, the WMO spokesperson told journalists that the agency’s Regional Climate Centre on Climate Monitoring, located in Germany, had predicted “a continuation of the drought situation and above-normal temperatures” of between 3° and 6° Celsius, above average.

“Almost daily warnings about forest fires” had been issued, Ms. Nullis said, noting that it was “very unusual” for this to happen so early in the year.

No specific event can be associated with climate change but current weather patterns are “consistent” with it, the WMO official said, citing “extreme heat, consistent heat, persistent heat and heavy precipitation”.