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At least 3,500 people have been made homeless by the storms



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## More than 60 killed in fierce Yemen storms

2 days ago

SANAA (AFP) — Aid operations swung into higher gear in Yemen on Saturday after floods killed at least 58 people and six more died from lightning strikes during two days of storms.

The interior ministry, updating an earlier toll, said at least 58 people died in flooding fed by torrential downpours in Hadramaut and Mahara provinces on Thursday and Friday.

At least five others were reported missing in Mahara.

Four people were also killed by lightning in the southern provinces of Tayez and Lahj, and a mother and son died when struck by lightning in the Al-Mahwit region near the Yemeni capital Sanaa.

But the toll could rise even further as rescue teams searched for victims who may still be trapped in homes swept away by floods and as the authorities launched an airlift to fly the stricken areas.

A first batch of six aircraft took off from Sanaa on Saturday loaded with tents, food and medicine for the Hadramaut capital of Al-Mukalla and Mahara, airport officials said.

"Other airlifts are scheduled for later in the day," one official said, adding that public and private organisations had been asked to help victims of the disaster.

The Organisation of the Islamic Conference described the situation as a "national catastrophe" and launched on Saturday a drive to collect funds to help Yemen's flood victims.

OIC chief Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, in a statement issued from the Saudi Red Sea city of Jeddah, urged members of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference as well as charity organisations and Muslim countries to help Yemen surmount "the grave humanitarian crisis."

Ihsanoglu called for "OIC solidarity with the people of Yemen in these difficult circumstances" and also urged the international community to provide assistance to Yemen, one of the world's least developed nations.

The oil-rich United Arab Emirates has said it will send emergency aid.

Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh toured Al-Mukalla on Friday to oversee operations after tasking a government commission with handling the rescue effort.

Rescue coordinators said that among the victims were



people who perished in Al-Mukalla, which is on the the Arabian Sea.

Both Hadramaut and Mahra provinces have been o declared disaster zones.

Bad weather continued to batter southeast coastal i on Saturday but residents said the skies were clear inland.

Military helicopters and others operated by oil firms hampered on Friday by strong winds as they fought rescue thousands of people stranded by the floods, according to one emergency official.

Local authorities in Yemen said that more than 500 were destroyed across Hadramaut province and 3, families made homeless. Flooding also caused hea damage to roads and power and water networks.

Among the affected areas was the UNESCO world site of Shibam which was totally cut off by the flood But the situation was returning to normal on Saturd officials said.

Shibam, with more than 20,000 residents, is famed high-rise mudbrick buildings, mostly dating from the century, that have given the town the moniker "the Manhattan of the desert."

It was established in the third century and built with profits from frankincense, which is still sold there.

Floods and lightning also claimed the lives of at lea people in April 2006 across eight provinces of the A peninsula country.