

9 February

The worst flooding in 30 years has hit Mozambique. The floods started on 7 February with heavy rainfall across Southern Africa. In South Africa, 26 people were killed while the military had to airlift foreign tourists cut off by floodwaters in Kruger National Park. But southern Mozambique bore the full impact of the rains and rising waters. In the capital, Maputo, tens of thousands of people were forced to flee their homes. The worst-hit were people living in makeshift homes in the slums around the capital. Further north, hundreds of thousands of people were left homeless in Gaza province. Roads, homes, bridges and crops were destroyed. Electricity supplies were disrupted and towns left without clean water supplies after their pumping stations were swept away. Flooding in Sofala made Mozambique's main north-south road impassable, cutting transport links between the capital and the second city, Beira.

U.N. officials estimate that 220,000 Mozambicans have already been forced from their homes by floods this month in the worst-hit provinces of Maputo and Gaza. A total of 800,000 are vulnerable to malaria, cholera, and other water-borne diseases. The Mozambique government has given no official death toll, but local newspapers report at least 48 have died. The rains have dislodged land mines, a legacy of the 16-year civil war which ended in 1992, increasing the danger they pose. President Joaquim Chissano planned to fly over devastated areas of the Limpopo Valley on Saturday. The waters of the Limpopo River were more than seven meters (23 feet) higher than normal and still rising.

The Southern Regional Water Board urged all residents of the the Limpopo Valley to be on "maximum alert." Authorities in Xai-Xai were fighting to stop waters flooding the city. "Our main attention now is to do all we can to prevent the collapse of the dyke, because if that happens the drama could take on catastrophic proportions," Xai-Xai Mayor Faquir Bay told the Noticias newspaper. Upstream, in Chibuto district, authorities threatened to use force to evacuate people who refused to leave their homes and farms. Some are reluctant to leave because they do not want to abandon their cattle, the main source of wealth in the region.

This report has been modified for educational purposes.