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Fredrick Nzwili

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NAIROBI, Kenya — April 23, 2020
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Catholic leaders in Kenya are appealing for humanitarian support in regions where landslides and floods have displaced thousands, as the country battles increasing cases of the coronavirus.

Church sources said the disasters had left a trail of death and destruction in the Rift Valley and Western Kenya regions, while introducing a new twist in the COVID-19 fight.

At least 4,000 have been displaced in the West Pokot and Elgeyo Marakwet counties in the Rift Valley in mudslides that have also killed 12 people. In Nyando, part of Kisumu County, an estimated 1,600 people are trapped in villages by floods, according to the sources.

"The parish center, a convent and nearby school are now submerged in water following days of heavy rainfall. The parish priest and nuns had to be evacuated, but the people are still trapped in their homes. They are crying for help. With a canoe, we can evacuate them to safer zones," Fr. Joachim Omollo, an Apostle of Jesus priest

in Kisumu Archdiocese, told Catholic News Service.

"I think all the attention is on COVID-19, but these people need emergency aid. If we don't act quickly, waterborne disease will soon strike, adding to the burden when the health systems are on the alert over COVID-19," he said.

The mudslides swept away a main market, a school, a police post and villages. With their homes and houses destroyed, the displaced families have camped in schools and other places on safer grounds.

The government, the Red Cross and churches — including the Catholic Church — have moved to provide some relief, including some food and clothes. County governments are promising to help the displaced people fight COVID-19 by providing water, soap and encouraging social distancing.

Before the landslide, the communities had been observing church and government COVID-19 guidelines, but concerns have emerged that these measures may be difficult to keep, leaving the people exposed to the disease in the new camps.

"We have been discouraging the people from congregating in one place due to the current situation in the country (COVID-19). Many of them have since moved in with relatives," said Bishop Dominic Kimengich of Eldoret. "We are also there, providing relief to the displaced persons."

The East African nation's Catholic bishops and clergy have been urging the people to observe the government's guidelines. By April 23, Kenya confirmed 320 cases of COVID-19, but the numbers were increasing daily.

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