

# Hundreds Dying in Mayotte Cyclone Indicating Years of Neglect in This French Territory

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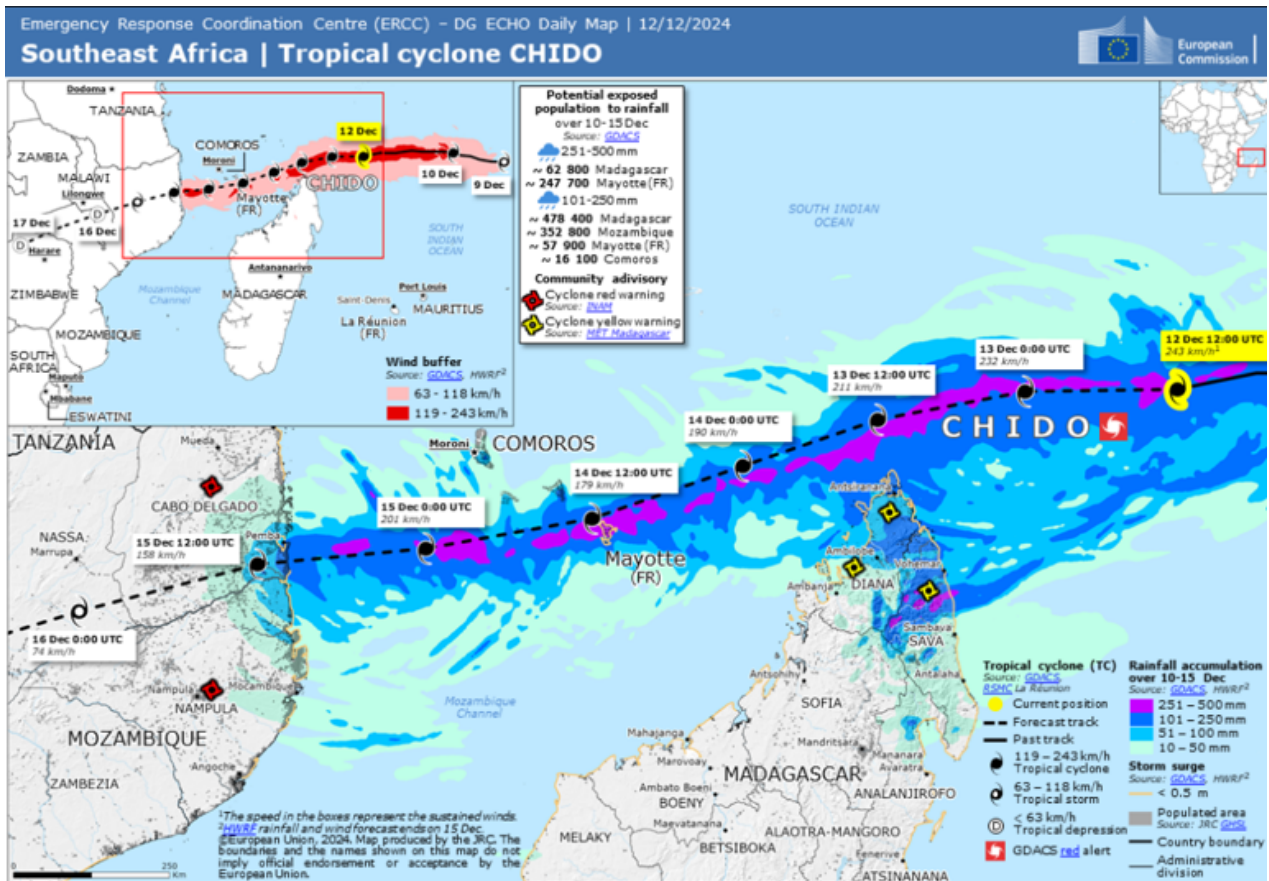
Region: [Europe](#)

Theme: [Environment](#), [Poverty & Social Inequality](#)

*While several reports on the Mayotte cyclone have spoken of hundreds of people dying, other reports, which have also quoted local officials, have expressed the apprehension that the number of dead may even be in the thousands. (See Reuters report 'several hundred, may be thousands have died in Mayotte cyclone', CBS report 'Thousands feared dead after Cyclone Chido hits French territory', NBC report 'Thousands feared dead in the archipelago of Mayotte'). What is more, recent reports, such as those by DW, have stated that following the weekend disaster there is a shortage of rescue workers and related help, despite rescue teams being sent from France.*

Mayotte is located in Indian Ocean off the East African coast, with Mozambique and Madagascar closest and France being as much as 8000km away. There has been growing social unrest in this French territory which has experienced prolonged neglect and widespread poverty. Over 75% of the people here are reported to be living below poverty line. People have suffered from chronic shortage of drinking water. Many of them live in shanty colonies. People returning to ancestral homes are sometimes labeled illegal settlers.

The people living in poor, weak shelters are highly vulnerable to disasters like sea storms and cyclones whose intensity has been rising in times of climate change. Last year, in 2023, Cyclone Freddy which devastated some neighboring areas was recorded as one of the highest intensity cyclones. Cyclone Chido which has just struck is also being talked about as a very high intensity cyclone.



The path of Tropical Cyclone Chido Emergency Response Coordination Centre ERCC  
 (Source: Emergency Response Coordination Centre ERCC)

However with adequate preparation and planning, even several low income countries have been able to improve disaster preparedness to such an extent that by combining timely warning and evacuation to special shelters that have been created nearby, it has been possible to prevent or significantly reduce loss of life even at the time of those cyclones which have destroyed a very large number of houses.

However despite the high vulnerability of the people of Mayotte, it is clear that adequate preventive and precautionary steps were not taken here.

Mayotte has a population of a little over 320,000 and for such a large number of deaths to take place in such a small population is a big tragedy. This has happened because no significant steps have been taken to improve the safety and resilience of the people at a time of increasing threats and in fact the vulnerability of the people here has been increasing.



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Recent reports from the area have stated that due to the strong religious feelings of burying the dead within 24 hours as well as due to other factors such as problems of data collection, the exact number of those who die may never be known, but at least steps can still be taken to improve the medical help for injured people and also to step up the rescue work in those areas where there are still chances of the life of trapped people being saved. The devastation has been so huge that the rehabilitation and reconstruction effort will be a big challenge. France is a rich country and must learn to give much more care and attention to the people of its several distant territories, instead of leaving three-fourths of the people in a place like Mayotte to live in poverty. In particular protection from disasters in these widely scattered places must get much higher attention matched by the inflow of adequate resources to take up the necessary protective and safety works.

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*Featured image: Soldiers remove fallen trees in the French territory of Mayotte in the Indian Ocean, after Cyclone Chido caused extensive damage with reports of several fatalities on Sunday Dec. 15, 2024. France mobilized emergency aid on Monday, deploying ships and military aircraft to assist Mayotte, its impoverished overseas territory in the Indian Ocean, after the island was devastated by its most severe storm in nearly a century. Etat Major des Armées/AP*

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