

LATIN AMERICA

Haiti Earthquake Death Toll Rises to More Than 1,200

Rescuers searching for hundreds of people still missing after the magnitude 7.2 temblor in the country's southern region

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At least 1,297 people were killed and some 5,700 injured in a devastating earthquake that struck Haiti this weekend, aggravating the crisis of an increasingly chaotic country whose president was assassinated last month and where a coming tropical storm threatens even more devastation.

Most of the fatalities from Saturday's 7.2 magnitude quake occurred in the country's southern peninsula, said Jerry Chandler, head of Haiti's civil-protection agency. More than 13,000 buildings in the area were destroyed, including churches, hospitals and at least two hotels, he said.

"People are crying in the streets, the walls of homes have collapsed. It is the worse experience a person could live through," said Linda Caracolis, a resident in the outskirts of the town of Jeremie. "People have lost their homes, their families. For the moment, we are on our own."

The fatality count was expected to rise as Haitians frantically searched for hundreds of people still missing on Sunday. Compounding problems, some aid agencies in the capital of Port-au-Prince said they were reluctant to send relief

efforts by road to the harder-hit south because of gangs that regularly extort and even kidnap drivers along the route.

“We are unable to ship goods to Les Cayes by road because shipments are attacked and hijacked,” said Akim Kikonda, the country representative of Catholic Relief Services. Instead, the charity intends to ship supplies to Les Cayes by sea using a program that was being set up by the World Food Programme, the United Nations’ food-assistance agency, he said.

The quake battered Haiti as it grappled with political turmoil after last month’s assassination of President Jovenel Moïse in Port-au-Prince. Prime Minister and interim President Ariel Henry was appointed to lead the government three weeks ago.

The nation has also been bracing for Tropical Storm Grace, expected to bring heavy rainfall and potentially flash floods as it moves across the Caribbean this week.

Haitians and aid agencies worry that the mounting troubles could spiral out of control and create a humanitarian crisis.

“You just keep on adding tragedy after tragedy. You keep on adding suffering onto suffering,” said Monique Clesca, a former U.N. official and writer in Port-au-Prince. “How much more can you take?”

Among the hardest-hit cities was Les Cayes, with a population of 125,000. The city’s hospitals, some of which were damaged by the temblor, were overwhelmed by the number of injured.

On Sunday, Udmay François, 22 years old, the mother of an 11-month-old boy, was writhing in pain on the grounds of Ofatma Hospital as she waited to be treated. She said she spent 11 hours buried in the ruins of her home, her infant lying under her before they were dug out.



A rescuer searched for survivors inside a damaged building in Les Cayes on Sunday.

PHOTO: JOSEPH ODELYN/ASSOCIATED PRESS

“Two floors fell on top of me with my baby under my stomach,” she said, crying. “I cried for help until I lost my voice. I heard voices but I didn’t have the strength to cry out, but my baby did, and someone heard.”

Ms. François said her baby was doing well, but her mother was buried in the ruins of the home where they lived. She said about 25 people lived in the apartment building, but fewer than 10 people came out alive. “In less than a minute, I lost my mother and my brother,” she said.

In Les Cayes, Job François, standing by his father’s collapsed house, said three people had been buried in the rubble. He, along with friends, were able to dig out his 30-year-old brother and his 1-year-old niece. They weren’t able to save a tenant, a woman who had been killed in the quake.

“I praise God for having spared me from this tragedy,” said Mr. François, who would have been at the house but had been called away to run an errand.

At least three hotels and two churches were destroyed in Les Cayes. Among the fatalities was Gabriel Fortuné, a hotel owner and a former mayor and senator.

The offices of Haiti's first cardinal, Chibly Langlois, collapsed, killing three people including a priest, said Mr. Kikonda of Catholic Relief Services, speaking from Port-au-Prince. He said Cardinal Langlois's injuries weren't life-threatening.

Prime Minister Henry said he was mobilizing government resources to aid those affected. He flew to the disaster zone Sunday and talked to injured survivors in Les Cayes.

"I offer my sympathy to the parents of the victims of this violent earthquake that has caused loss of human life and material damage in several departments of the country," he said in a tweet.



At least three hotels and two churches were destroyed in Les Cayes, a port on Haiti's southern coast, according to local residents.

PHOTO: STANLEY LOUIS/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE/GETTY IMAGES

President Biden authorized immediate aid to Haiti.

"In what is already a challenging time for the people of Haiti, I am saddened by the devastating earthquake," he said in a statement. "We send our deepest condolences to all those who lost a loved one or saw their homes and businesses destroyed."

The U.S. Agency for International Development deployed a 65-person team at the request of Haiti's government to assist in urban search-and-rescue operations,

USAID Administrator Samantha Power said in a Twitter post on Sunday. The U.S. Coast Guard said it was transporting medical personnel and supplies from Port-au-Prince to the southern peninsula, and bringing injured patients to hospitals in the capital.

In Rome, Pope Francis called for nations to send aid to help Haiti. “May the solidarity of all alleviate the consequences of the tragedy,” the pope said.

Haiti still hasn’t recovered completely from a devastating 2010 quake, which caused billions of dollars in damage and prompted hundreds of thousands of Haitians to migrate from the country in the years that followed.

Saturday’s quake occurred along the same fault as the 2010 temblor and released roughly two times the energy, said William Yeck, a research geophysicist at the U.S. Geological Survey. The epicenter of this quake was about 70 miles from the crowded capital, which has 2.8 million people in the greater metro area, compared with 20 miles in the 2010 quake.

Haiti Earthquake Leaves Path of Destruction

More than 1,400 people are dead and thousands more injured after a magnitude 7.2 temblor



Little was left of a funeral home in Les Cayes after the earthquake. Haiti's civil-defense agency has estimated that some 37,000 buildings were destroyed in the region that was hardest hit. MATIAS DELACROIX/ASSOCIATED PRESS

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Widespread damage occurred near the epicenter of Saturday's quake.

“We know from 2010 in Haiti that the buildings are very fragile, and very vulnerable to shaking, and that’s really why these earthquakes are so catastrophic there. As well, there’s a really dense population,” Mr. Yeck said.

Across southern Haiti, residents spent the night sleeping outdoors, afraid their homes would collapse as aftershocks continued to rattle the nation. Residents said they were afraid to go back inside, but also afraid to stay outside given the country's chronic crime and the incoming storm.

“Only God can help us,” said Nephtalie Marie Vrambling, 24, who has an injured knee. “We can't stay outside, and we can't go inside our houses after all that has happened.”

She said five people lived in her house, and two of them were buried in the debris of the heavily damaged home for some time after the quake struck. All survived, but she said three children and two adults died in nearby homes.

Haiti's political turmoil and fragile state compound the challenges of delivering aid to the peninsula, which was devastated during Hurricane Matthew in 2016, said Jim Ansara, co-founder of Build Health International, a U.S. nonprofit that works in Haiti.



People displaced from the earthquake spent Saturday night outside next to a hospital in Les Cayes.

PHOTO: JOSEPH ODELYN/ASSOCIATED PRESS

“In the southern peninsula, there is little functioning federal government and there is no emergency response,” he said. “We saw this with Hurricane Matthew.

There was no relief for four or five days.”

On Haitian radio, local leaders went on the air to describe the destruction. Sorel Jacinthe, a former senator, told the Magik9 radio station that the quake destroyed as much as 70% of the seaside city of Corail, which has more than 20,000 residents. At least eight people were dead, and the only hospital was out of supplies, including water and gauze. “People are dying for lack of care,” he told the radio station.

The quake destroyed nine of 15 towns in the Grand’Anse department, Mr. Jacinthe said.

Pascal Calixte, the former mayor of Baraderes, a town of some 50,000 on the northwestern shore of Haiti’s southern peninsula, said about 90% of the town’s houses were destroyed. “There are many casualties, many injured,” Mr. Calixte said in an interview on Magik9. He said the town’s hospital had been damaged and couldn’t take care of the injured.

—*Drew Hinshaw contributed to this article.*

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