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Earthquake in Morocco Devastates a Region



Residents dig through the rubble searching for missing family members in Morocco. Photo Credit: Sergey Ponomarev, The New York Times

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Cities across the Atlas Mountains are left damaged and dilapidated after the earthquake shocked and brought crisis to historic cities across the range. REUTERS/ Nacho Doce

Natural disasters have struck numerous countries worldwide, and Morocco is one of the latest to bear the brunt of such casualties. On the night of Friday, September 8, 2023, at 11:11 p.m. local time, Morocco experienced an unexpected earthquake that continued to exact a heavy toll a week later.¹ The epicenter of this catastrophe was located in Marrakech, Al Haouz province, but its most severe impact was felt in the rural communities nestled in the Atlas Mountains. The death toll is approximately 3,000 with twice that number suffering injuries from the initial earthquake and its relentless aftershocks.²

The epicenter of this seismic upheaval lay in the vibrant city of Marrakech, nestled within the picturesque Al Haouz province. However, Morocco's tranquil rural communities nestled in the Atlas Mountains bore the brunt of nature's fury. The death toll has steadily risen, now approaching

¹ Jazeera, Al. "What We Know Three Days after Morocco's Devastating Earthquake." *Earthquakes News / Al Jazeera*, Al Jazeera, 11 Sept. 2023, www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/9/11/what-we-know-three-days-after-moroccos-devastating-earthquake.

² Jazeera, Al. "What We Know Three Days after Morocco's Devastating Earthquake." *Earthquakes News / Al Jazeera*, Al Jazeera, 11 Sept. 2023, www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/9/11/what-we-know-three-days-after-moroccos-devastating-earthquake.

a heart-wrenching 3,000 people. Twice that number bears the physical and emotional scars of injuries sustained from the initial earthquake and its relentless aftershocks.



After the earthquake, many families now know many of the streets around them as their new homes after hundreds of homes were destroyed. Photo/Mosa'ab Elshamy.

A Nation in Crisis

Sadly, countless Moroccans are stripped of shelter, food, and water. Entire cities, towns, and villages lie in ruins, leaving survivors in despair and uncertainty. The earthquake's impact was severe, with buildings and infrastructure bearing the brunt of its wrath. Homes, schools, and hospitals, once symbols of community strength, now stood as crumbling ruins or unsafe remnants of a sacred era.³ Due to such an event, there is a saddening displacement of thousands in dire need of immediate assistance and support.

Compared to developed nations, there is an evident difference in infrastructure where Morocco could have fared better. The earthquake tragically affected this nation as most of the foundations of buildings are made in a manner that is about 1,000 years old, mud brick. Usually, mud bricks consist of mud and water with other debris often mixed and dried in the sun rather than in an oven, ensuring a sturdy foundation.⁴ These foundations, along with the age of most buildings, compromised the structural integrity of the cities as the earthquake caused tragic and devastating

³ IMC. "Morocco Earthquake: Situation Report #2 (September 14, 2023) - Morocco." *ReliefWeb*, 14 Sept. 2023, reliefweb.int/report/morocco/morocco-earthquake-situation-report-2-september-14-2023.

⁴ Ramsay, Stuart, director. *Morocco Earthquake: People's Homes Have Been "Utterly Destroyed."* YouTube, YouTube, 12 Sept. 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oQk40X7o8-Y>. Accessed 15 Sept. 2023.

destructions with the deterioration of whole houses, neighborhoods, and even the Medina, a tourist attraction. The mass damage has left the nation in a tragic crisis as many are suffering to relocate and take care of their families.

In some of the most remote locations, reaching those injured and deceased was a tremendous difficulty. This is due to the inability to reach them as most of these locations were inaccessible until the Tuesday after the initial earthquake.⁵ Many families tried to seek help but instead decided to go themselves and start rescuing their own families from the rubble. Some residents complained rescue crews did not show up for days, leaving families to dig through the rubble themselves by hand. In addition, the government only release several short statements during the first days of the crisis and there was an impression of reluctance to accept help from certain countries.

With Morocco's limited highways, this journey has been highly catastrophic as it has taken a few days to reach those still alive under the rubble, searching for hope of life.⁶ In this environment, it has been difficult for those affected to continue their lives as they leave their homes and belongings. Many go to homes for the displaced, but some turn away in fear of their government.⁷ With Morocco's limited highways, this journey has been highly catastrophic as it has taken a few days to reach those still alive under the rubble, searching for hope of life. ⁸In this, it has been difficult for those affected to continue their lives as they leave their homes and belongings. Many go to homes for the displaced, but some turn away in fear of their government.

Tragically, the Moroccan earthquake claimed many lives, with casualties reported nationwide. Injured individuals, bearing both physical and emotional scars, have overwhelmed hospitals. Search and rescue teams performed heroic feats, rescuing survivors while mourning those

⁵ CDP. "2023 Morocco Earthquake." *Center for Disaster Philanthropy*, 21 Sept. 2023, disasterphilanthropy.org/disasters/2023-morocco-earthquake/.

⁶ Eljechtimi, Ahmed, and Abdulhak Balhaki. "Morocco Earthquake Kills More than 2,000 People, Survivors Sleep Outdoors." *Reuters*, Thomson Reuters, 10 Sept. 2023, www.reuters.com/world/africa/magnitude-7-earthquake-strikes-morocco-gfz-2023-09-08/.

⁷ Jazeera, Al. "What We Know Three Days after Morocco's Devastating Earthquake." *Earthquakes News / Al Jazeera*, Al Jazeera, 11 Sept. 2023, www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/9/11/what-we-know-three-days-after-moroccos-devastating-earthquake.

⁸ Ortiz, Erik. "Morocco Earthquake Updates: Rescuers Dig for Survivors with Their Hands." *NBCNews.Com*, NBCUniversal News Group, 11 Sept. 2023, www.nbcnews.com/news/world/live-blog/morocco-earthquake-live-update-death-toll-rescuers-dig-hand-rcna104322.

lost to nature's unrestrictive power. The nation is fighting for itself and those taken by the destructive earthquake, which will be recorded in its history for years.



The earthquake brought massive destruction as this car sits buried beneath the rubble left behind. Nariman El-Mofty/ The New York Times

A Beacon of Hope

Although the country was unprepared for this earthquake, the Government of Morocco has set up a military hospital where over 1,000 patients have been treated. Remarkably, they have simultaneously set up a psychiatric unit within the hospital, a first for this nation. This specialized care has aided those suffering catastrophic loss and the number of patients projected for the coming days does not falter. This is now a necessary measure for the nation has lost a number of families.

In response to this dire situation, humanitarian efforts surged into action. Local and international organizations banded together to provide aid, medical assistance, and shelter to those battered and bruised by the earthquake.⁹ This collective endeavor aimed to meet immediate needs and restore a sense of security and dignity to the affected communities.

Many European countries, ex-Patriots, and organizations have helped those in need during these trying times. This effort is crucial for those most affected by the earthquake as the aftershocks

⁹ Morris, Loveday, and Annabelle Timsit. "Morocco's Reluctance to Accept Quake Aid Baffles Foreign Governments." *The Washington Post*, WP Company, 12 Sept. 2023, www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/09/11/morocco-earthquake-foreign-aid/.

continue shaking what they knew as their homes and themselves. Most donations include sleeping bags, water, food, and money to acquire these things that will later be transported to Moroccans in need. In a display of unwavering solidarity, the international community swiftly extended a helping hand to Morocco. Condolences, support, and assistance poured in, underlining the importance of global cooperation in the face of disaster. This united effort is done in a manner that ensures a swift and effective recovery for the affected communities.



In the aftermath of the earthquake, women lined up few days after to collect donations. Nacho Doce/Reuters

Rebuilding from Ruins

As the nation embarks on the journey to recovery and rebuilding, a crucial priority emerges—the reconstruction of essential services. Healthcare facilities, schools, and critical infrastructure must be resurrected. By breathing life back into these vital components of society, we can provide relief and a glimmer of hope to the beleaguered regions. Sadly, some areas have suffered significant loss with 85% damage, which will take about five to six years to reconstruct. Many have taken to living on the roadside as their new home as whole neighborhoods operate as one united front caring for one another. The tragic loss has caused entire communities to keep one another alive and safe as the effects of the aftershocks continue.¹⁰ The initial tremor radiated fear and chaos throughout the region, with homes, streets, and communities crumbling around their inhabitants.

¹⁰ University, Stanford. “Understanding the Disproportionate Impacts of the Morocco Earthquake.” *Stanford News*, 12 Sept. 2023, news.stanford.edu/2023/09/12/understanding-disproportionate-impacts-marrakech-earthquake/.

The relentless aftershocks that followed the initial earthquake were haunting reminders that the danger persisted. People sought safety in open spaces, clutching their loved ones, as the earth defied its age-old stability. Seismologists and scientists worked tirelessly to monitor the ongoing seismic activity, providing a fragile glimmer of hope amid the uncertainty. Although they remained while recovering from an event of a similar magnitude, the earthquake still hit as those continued to rebuild and reconstruct their homes and their sense of peace and unity during these trying times.

Yet, amid this chaos, the spirit of the Moroccan people shines through. Volunteers joined the rescue and relief operations, illustrating that unity and resilience, even in the darkest hours, can prevail. Around the world, nations expressed their condolences and helped, underscoring the importance of global cooperation during times of crisis. While the immediate focus remained on saving lives and providing essential aid, the international community recognized the long road to recovery.



Discussion between Morocco and Spain's search and rescue teams soon after the Moroccan earthquake. AP Photo/Mosa'ab Elshamy.

Moving On

As the dust begins to settle and grief begins to grow less, Morocco faces rebuilding its structures and the lives affected by this seismic catastrophe. This tragedy is one of many reminders of the importance of earthquake preparedness and the need for continued vigilance in a world where nature's forces remain unpredictable. Although a series of earthquakes have hit the nation, there was no prediction of this, which has left a significant loss of life and morale for the country. It has been clear that all are there for one another during these challenging times, and with every effort of rebuilding and caring, one can observe that the nation can stand firm again soon. In Moroccan history, the earthquake of 2023 will forever be recognized for its period of devastation

and resilience. This struggle tested the limits of human endurance and compassion. Yet, it also revealed the remarkable strength of the Moroccan spirit in the face of adversity as all hope they will recover soon.

**To Aid Victims and their Families Please consider Donating to:
The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)**

www.ifrc.org



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