

Morocco's government raises human toll to 632 died and 329 injured after a powerful quake

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A rare, powerful earthquake struck Morocco late Friday night, killing hundreds of people and damaging buildings from villages in the Atlas Mountains to the historic city of Marrakech. Morocco's Interior Ministry said Saturday morning that at least 632 people had died, mostly in Marrakech and five provinces near the quake's epicenter. Another 329 people were injured. Casualty figures were expected to rise more as the search continues and as rescuers reach remote areas.

Moroccan television showed scenes from the aftermath, as many stayed outside fearing aftershocks. Anxious families stood in streets or huddled on the pavement, some carrying children, blankets or other belongings. Emergency workers looked for survivors in the rubble of buildings, their reflective yellow vests illuminating the nighttime landscape. The quake ripped a gaping hole in a home, and a car was nearly buried by the chunks of a collapsed building. Baskets, buckets and clothing could be seen amid scattered stones in the remains of one building.

Moroccan media reported that the 12th century Koutoubia Mosque in Marrakech, one of the city's most famed landmarks, suffered damage, but the extent was not immediately clear. Its 69-meter (226-foot) minaret is known as the "roof of Marrakech." Moroccans also posted videos showing damage to parts of the famous red walls that surround the old city in Marrakech, a UNESCO World Heritage site.

The head of a town near the earthquake's epicenter told Moroccan news site 2M that several homes in nearby towns had partly or totally collapsed, and electricity and roads were cut off in some places. Abderrahim Ait Daoud, head of the town of Talat N'Yaaqoub, said authorities are working to clear roads in Al Haouz Province to allow passage for ambulances and aid to populations affected, but said large distances between mountain villages mean it will take time to learn the extent of the damage.

Local media reported that roads leading to the mountain region around the epicenter were jammed with vehicles and blocked with collapsed rocks, slowing rescue efforts. Messages of support began to roll in from around the world on Saturday. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz posted condolences on X, the platform formerly known as Twitter. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, currently hosting the Group of 20 summit of the world's largest economies, wrote that "India is ready to offer all possible assistance to Morocco in this difficult time."

A U.N. spokesperson said that "the United Nations is ready to assist the government of Morocco in its efforts to assist the impacted population." The U.S. Geological Survey said the quake had a preliminary magnitude of 6.8 when it hit at 11:11 p.m. (2211 GMT), with shaking that lasted several seconds. The U.S. agency reported a magnitude-4.9 aftershock hit 19 minutes later.

The epicenter of Friday's tremor was near the town of Ighil in Al Haouz Province, roughly 70 kilometers (43.5 miles) south of Marrakech. The USGS said the epicenter was 18 kilometers (11 miles) below the Earth's surface, while Morocco's seismic agency put it at 11 kilometers (7 miles) down. Such shallow quakes are more dangerous.

Earthquakes are relatively rare in North Africa. Lahcen Mhanni, Head of the Seismic Monitoring and Warning Department at the National Institute of Geophysics, told 2M TV that the earthquake was the strongest ever recorded in the mountain region.

In 1960, a magnitude 5.8 tremor struck near the Moroccan city of Agadir and caused thousands of deaths. The Agadir quake prompted changes in construction rules in Morocco, but many buildings, especially rural homes, are not built to withstand such tremors.

In 2004, a 6.4 magnitude earthquake near the Mediterranean coastal city of Al Hoceima left more than 600 dead. Friday's quake was felt as far away as Portugal and Algeria, according to the Portuguese Institute for Sea and Atmosphere and Algeria's Civil Defense agency, which oversees emergency response.