

# Turkey-Syria quake deaths pass 28,000, UN expects toll to top 50,000

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**Online Desk:** Rescuers pulled a seven-month-old baby and a teenage girl from the rubble on Sunday, nearly a week after an earthquake devastated Turkey and Syria and killed more than 28,000. UN relief chief Martin Griffiths said he expected the death toll to top 50,000 after he arrived in southern Turkey on Saturday to assess the quake's damage. Tens of thousands of rescue workers are scouring flattened neighbourhoods despite freezing weather that has deepened the misery of millions now in desperate need of aid, according to AFP reports.

Security concerns led some aid operations to be suspended, and dozens of people have been arrested for looting or trying to defraud victims in the aftermath of the quake in Turkey, according to state media. But miraculous tales of survival still emerged from the destruction and despair. "Is the world there?" asked 70-year-old Menekse Tabak as she was pulled out from the concrete in the southern city of Kahramanmaraş — the epicentre of Monday's 7.8-magnitude tremor — to applause and cries praising God, according to a video on state broadcaster TRT Haber.

A seven-month-old baby named Hamza was also rescued in southern Hatay more than 140 hours after the quake, while Esma Sultan, 13, was also saved in Gaziantep, state media reported. Families were racing against time to find their missing relatives' bodies in southern Turkey. "We hear (the authorities) will no longer keep the bodies waiting after a certain period of time, they say they will take them and bury them," Tuba Yolcu said in Kahramanmaraş. Another family clutched each other in grief at a cotton field transformed into a cemetery, with a seemingly endless stream of bodies arriving for swift burial.

Griffiths toured quake-hit areas of Kahramanmaraş on Saturday, telling Sky News he expected the death toll to "double or more". "Soon, the search and rescue people will make way for the humanitarian agencies whose job it is to look after the extraordinary numbers of those affected for the next months," he said in a video posted to Twitter. The United Nations has warned that at least 870,000 people urgently need hot meals across Turkey and Syria. In Syria alone, up to 5.3 million people may have been made homeless. Almost 26 million people have been affected by the earthquake, the World Health Organization (WHO) said as it launched a flash appeal on Saturday for \$42.8 million to cope with immediate, towering health needs. It warned that dozens of hospitals had been damaged. Turkey's disaster agency said more than 32,000 people from Turkish organisations are working on search-and-rescue efforts. There are also 8,294 international rescuers.

Restaurants are working hard in Gaziantep city, Turkey's gourmet capital, among tens of thousands of volunteers to help and feed families. "Our co-workers are in a bad situation. Their families are victims and their houses are destroyed," said Burhan Cagdas, the owner of a local diner that has served up to 4,000 free meals a day outdoors since the tragedy struck. His own family has been sleeping in cars since Monday in the city where at least 2,000 have died and tens of thousands have been forced out of unsafe homes.

Clashes have also been reported and the UN rights office on Friday urged all sides in the affected area — where Kurdish militants and Syrian rebels operate — to allow humanitarian access. Austrian soldiers and German rescue workers called off their searches for several hours on Saturday in Hatay, citing difficult security amid firing between local groups. The outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party, considered a terrorist group by Ankara and its Western allies, has announced a temporary halt in fighting to ease recovery work. A border crossing between Armenia and Turkey also opened for the first time in 35 years on Saturday to allow five trucks carrying food and water into the quake-hit region.

Aid has been slow to arrive in Syria, where years of conflict have ravaged the healthcare system and parts of

the country remain under the control of rebels. WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus took a flight full of emergency medical equipment into the quake-stricken city of Aleppo on Saturday. Tedros toured damaged areas of the city and met two children who lost their parents in the earthquake. "There are no words to express the pain they are going through," he tweeted. Damascus said it had approved the delivery of humanitarian assistance to quake-hit areas outside its control in Idlib province and a convoy was expected to leave on Sunday. The delivery was later postponed without explanation.

The transport ministry said 57 aid planes had landed in Syria this week. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has urged the Security Council to authorise the opening of new cross-border aid points between Turkey and Syria. The council will meet to discuss Syria, possibly early next week. Turkey said it was working on opening two new routes into rebel-held parts of Syria.

Five days of grief and anguish have been slowly building into rage at the poor quality of buildings as well as the government's response to Turkey's worst disaster in nearly a century. Officials say 12,141 buildings were either destroyed or seriously damaged in the earthquake. Turkish police reportedly detained 12 people on Saturday, including contractors, over collapsed buildings in the southeastern provinces of Gaziantep and Sanliurfa. Officials and medics said 24,617 people had died in Turkey and 3,574 in Syria. The confirmed total now stands at 28,191.