

Public anger grows as death toll in Turkey-Syria earthquake rises

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The catastrophe is worsening after Monday's 7.7 and 7.6 magnitude earthquakes in Kahramanmara?, on Turkey's southern border with Syria, destroyed thousands of buildings in both countries.

Turkey's Health Minister Fahrettin Koca announced last night that the death toll from the earthquakes, which hit 10 cities in Turkey, has reached 5,434, with nearly 32,000 injured. Syria has also been hit hard: 1,600 people died, and nearly 4,000 people have been injured.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an announced yesterday that his government has decided to declare a state of emergency for three months in 10 cities hit by the earthquake. The bill is to be voted in parliament today.

Responding to widespread protests to his government's inaction in the face of the earthquake disaster with an attempt at intimidation, Erdo?an claimed there is "national unity," stating: "While the state and the nation are working hand in hand to overcome this historic disaster, we are closely monitoring those who intend to pit our people against each other with fake news and distortions."

Erdo?an added: "When the time comes, we will bring them to account. Our prosecutors identify those who try to create social chaos with such inhumane methods and take the necessary actions swiftly."

In reality, the social chaos in the region is the result of the government's turning a blind eye to the widely foreseen earthquake disaster and its indifference to the consequences. Yesterday, while Agriculture and Forestry Minister Vahit Kiri?çi was met with protests in Adana, masses of earthquake victims protested in the governor's office in Ad?yaman, chanting: "Ad?yaman is unprotected." Both cities were devastated by the earthquakes.

The government is trying to criminalize posts by journalists or social media users that reveal the almost complete lack of state response in the disaster area and the fact that millions of people, including those trapped under the rubble, are abandoned to their fate.

Yesterday, an anti-democratic investigation was opened against Tele1 TV journalists Enver Aysever and Merdan

Yanarda? on charges of "public incitement to hatred and hostility" for their statements on the earthquake disaster.

Meanwhile, the Journalists' Union in Turkey issued a statement last night, saying: "With the announcement of the state of emergency, journalists are being removed from the rubble in some regions. Investigations are being opened against TV commentators and social media users. They want to censor those who talk about negligence and places where help is not coming."

Millions of people across the country and internationally have mobilized to collect and deliver aid to the earthquake victims. Many health care workers and miners trained in search and rescue have also volunteered to go to the region. However, coal miners in Zonguldak were only able to reach the affected region after 36 hours because the authorities did not arrange a plane.

Other aid personnel also had great difficulty in reaching the necessary places. Many volunteers complained on social media about the lack of coordination and organization by the state. Every moment lost worked against those under the rubble.

Around 23 million people in Turkey and Syria are thought to have been directly affected by the earthquake. The harsh winter conditions in both countries, with snow and rain, necessitated the rapid rescue of tens of thousands of people trapped under the rubble. However, neither in Turkey nor in Syria was this requirement met.

In Syria, divided by the 12-year war for regime change waged by NATO powers, including Turkey, and with many buildings damaged before the earthquake, the Damascus government's ability to help earthquake victims continues to be undermined by crippling imperialist sanctions. There is no international aid or comprehensive search and rescue efforts in the affected towns in northern Syria.

In Turkey, the damage to highways and airports built on fault lines undermined the disaster response, but the Erdo?an government's incapable response to the earthquake exposes its political bankruptcy. This is not a failure of this or that official but a reflection of the indifference of the financial

oligarchy to the suffering and vital needs of the broad masses.

Remarkably, 36 hours after the earthquake, there were still places where search and rescue teams have not reached. In many places, urgent needs such as shelter, electricity, heating and water cannot be met. While earthquake survivors say there are many bodies under and above the rubble, these terrible conditions also point to the danger of disease outbreaks.

“With the addition of the search and rescue teams that have reached Hatay as of tonight, we will be doubling the number of teams for tomorrow,” Health Minister Koca said last night. However, these teams should have reached the affected in the very first hours.

According to Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD) official Orhan Tatar, around 24,000 personnel of many different organizations are on duty in the earthquake zone. Since around 6,000 buildings in Turkey have completely collapsed, this means that for every building that collapsed, there are only four personnel on duty. This obvious inadequacy has led to the deaths of those trapped under the rubble, as search and rescue operations in many areas were either non-existent or started too late.

Speaking to BBC Türkçe yesterday morning, Arzu Dedeo?lu, a resident of Hatay’s Iskenderun district, said: “We waited until the evening but no one came. We brought a crane by our own means, but they didn’t want to and they intervened to stop. There are two children [under the rubble], my sister’s children, Ay?egül and ?layda. The children have passed away!”

Dedeo?lu cried out against the late arrival of aid, adding: “Why didn’t those who came now come before noon? We brought a generator by our own means, we tried, but we ran away when the apartment shook with the aftershocks.”

According to the same report, earthquake victims waited all day for help, but the cries from those trapped in the rubble stopped yesterday morning. “If you had come yesterday, we would have saved them,” another woman said.

In the same place, a citizen named Ali Önder expressed his anger at the state and the political establishment, stating: “I have eight people under the rubble. No one has come, and there is still no AFAD. Don’t let those who leave us alone like this come to ask for our votes, don’t! There is no one on behalf of the state, everyone pulled out their relatives by their own means. We dug with our hands!”

However, the government has deployed more police and gendarmes to the region than search and rescue workers specialized in earthquakes. According to Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu, 18,000 gendarmes and about 10,000 police officers have been dispatched to the region, and 10,000 more will be sent.

Speaking to Cumhuriyet TV in Elbistan district of Kahramanmara? yesterday, an earthquake victim said: “No one has arrived. Everyone is cold, and tents have not been set up. All living beings died under the debris. Not a single [official] person came. Elbistan was left to die.”

These massive earthquakes have long been expected, and scientists have explained what needed to be done to prevent such devastating consequences.

Hüseyin Alan, chairman of the Chamber of Geological Engineers, exposed the guilt of the government and the political establishment as follows: “There are many reports and academic articles on the fact that these faults will produce earthquakes and could break at any moment. Taking these into account, we have often tried to draw attention to this region. In fact, our Chamber has conducted studies for 24 cities and more than 500 neighborhoods and settlements on this fault. We have repeatedly said and written that these settlements should be prepared for earthquakes.”

He added: “We prepared and presented reports on this issue. We have presented this report to the President, to the relevant ministries. We have repeatedly pointed out that measures need to be taken. We didn’t get a single response. ... Not from the President, not from an MP ... No one turned to us. ... Not even a single improvement was made. All our warnings went unanswered. ... So the expected happened. It was blindingly obvious. We knew this was going to happen.”

In an interview with Habertürk TV channel yesterday, respected geologist Prof. Dr. Naci Görür emphasized that their warnings were not heeded. He explained: “It is clear what we will do. We have to build earthquake-resistant cities. The first priority of future governments should not be roads and airports. Of course they should also be built. But the first priority is to build earthquake-resilient cities that will ensure the safety of the people.”

This scientific requirement for public health and safety can only be fulfilled on an international scale and under socialism, which is based not on private profit but on the needs of society.



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