

Mass protest on second anniversary of deadly Turkey-Syria earthquake

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Two years ago, on February 6, 2023, two massive earthquakes devastated southern Turkey and northern Syria, officially killing over 60,000 people. More than 100,000 were injured and millions left homeless. The natural disaster was also a crime made far worse by the policies of the ruling class that put the profit and accumulation of wealth above human life and safety.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* explained, the government of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and local authorities took no precautions against the potential massive earthquakes that scientists and official reports had long warned of, leaving millions of people in unsafe buildings to their fate. The loss of life was compounded by the prolonged disruption of official search and rescue efforts following the earthquake's devastation.

In Hatay, where the earthquake caused the worst destruction and officially killed 23,000 people, thousands are still struggling to survive in containers and tents two years later. These conditions, in which access to the most basic humanitarian needs is difficult, and the unpunished negligence have led to deep anger in the population.

On Thursday, the commemorations and silent marches in the streets of Hatay were not only a ritual of mourning but also expressed a powerful desire to confront this injustice. Thousands of people mourned their loved ones and showed their anger against the state authorities, the lack of accountability of those responsible and the continued policy of impunity.

The commemorations were overshadowed by arbitrary restrictions imposed by the police. Although the Hatay Governor's Office stated that the police barricades were set up for "security reasons" and that the ban on marches was taken in this context, this provoked great anger among the earthquake victims.

The barricades severely restricted freedom of movement, especially for those who wanted to participate in civil commemorations other than the official ceremonies. Groups that wanted to march were prevented from doing so, while the earthquake survivors who gathered on the call of the "February 6th Earthquake Platform" faced police intervention. Thousands have protested this arbitrary ban.

These restrictions, which violate the right to mourn, commemorate losses, and protest those officially responsible, have again exposed the government's deep indifference and contempt towards the masses of earthquake survivors and the tens of thousands of dead.

Speaking to *Anka News Agency*, a survivor said, "It is as if we are living the earthquake every moment... There is mud and debris everywhere. Our victims have not been found yet. People are still living in tents and containers. None of the promises have been kept."

While the city's main and secondary roads were still too damaged to use, the area around the official ceremony was hastily paved. One survivor said angrily, "The lights and the asphalt were just done yesterday. Because the president [Erdoğan] is coming."

Survivors who wanted to enter the official ceremony area were prevented from doing so for "security" reasons. They responded with slogans such as "Open the gates" and "Can anyone hear our voices?", while one said, "They didn't hear our voices during the earthquake, will they hear us now?"

Due to the protests, the barricades were removed after the official ceremony. However, at the final point of the march demonstrators encountered another police barricade.

Although the survivors tried to march through the barricades from time to time, they faced the attacks of the riot police. Three people were beaten and arrested

during the scuffle. A banner reading “Justice for Ilg?m Building” was confiscated. More than 80 people were killed when the Ilg?m building, which was only three years old, collapsed within seconds.

These police attacks were protested by earthquake victims with slogans such as “Police, sell bagels and live with dignity”, “Government resign”, “Governor resign” and “Open the door, open the barricade.”

The Chamber of Urban Planners Ankara Branch has stated that the most basic needs such as shelter, clean water, food, transportation and public services are still not met in the earthquake zone, especially in Hatay and Malatya. A third of the buildings destroyed in Hatay have still not been rebuilt and more than 200,000 people are still living in containers.

Living conditions in containers fall far short of humanitarian standards. In Malatya, where 113,000 people still live in containers, only a third of the new housing has been completed. Rents are exorbitant and rental subsidies do not cover the costs.

There are serious environmental problems. Landfills cause pollution, and hazardous materials such as asbestos threaten public health. Unchecked mineral exploration is exacerbating ecological degradation. Basic public services such as education, health, and transportation are inadequate; many schools have overcrowded classrooms.

In Hatay’s cultural heritage sites, including the historic city of Antakya, the principles of monument protection are ignored and unplanned. These threaten both the historical texture and the social memory of the region.

According to the *Hatay News Agency*, Safiye Demirci, who lost her house in the earthquake, is living in a tent with her disabled son in the Çekmece district. Demirci, who did not receive any aid because her house was considered “slightly damaged,” is unable to make necessary repairs.

“I have to live in a tent, I have no other choice,” she said, adding that they are trying to survive on her son’s salary alone. “We even have to buy water. We didn’t have a bathroom for a while. We were able to have a bathroom and toilet installed with the help of our neighbour,” Demirci said, “We’ve been living in the dark for two years. Where are the authorities?”

Mutia Çivi and her husband, who live in the Samanda? district, are among the countless people who

lost their homes in the earthquake. Although they applied for containers, their request was not granted due to the lack of infrastructure in the region, so they are still living in a tent.

Çivi said that after a year of washing their clothes by hand in cold water, they were able to get a washing machine and water connection thanks to an association. However, they continue to face difficulties because they still do not have electricity.

Çivi has described the desperation they experienced in the first days after the earthquake: “We had no shoes, no clothes, and no food. We waited for days without finding anything.” Although two years have passed, infrastructure problems have not been solved. Çivi added: “There was not enough infrastructure even to get a container. We don’t deserve to be forced to live in these conditions.”

Earthquake victims in Hatay are waiting for financial assistance to repair their homes or for containers to provide safe shelter. They demand permanent solutions from the authorities and want their voices to be heard.

Two years after the February 6 earthquakes, the fact that even the most basic needs of the earthquake victims have not been met and that almost no official measures have been taken to prevent similar disasters today, reveals the bankruptcy of both the bourgeois political establishment and the capitalist system. The solution to the fundamental social problems of the masses in Turkey and all over the world requires the conscious intervention of the working class and the construction of a socialist economy based on human needs and not private profit.



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