

Flood disaster in Istanbul, at least 9 people dead

Ozan Özgür
21 October 2026

Torrential rain that struck Istanbul and the surrounding region on Wednesday, October 14, has once again turned the city of 16 million people into the scene of a major social catastrophe. According to the Istanbul Governor's Office, seven people were killed in Istanbul and two more in neighbouring Kocaeli.

The downpour, described as the most severe since records began in 1942, turned streets into rivers and flooded homes and workplaces. Torrent-swept cars piled up at the bottom of hills.

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's government and the bourgeois media have presented the disaster as an unavoidable act of nature. But heavy rainfall turned into a deadly flood because decades of urban development, driven by real estate speculation and profit, have filled the city's streambeds with concrete. At the same time, the capitalist system has produced an existential climate crisis.

According to the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality's Disaster Coordination Centre (AKOM), between 130 and 277 millimetres of rain fell in a single day in the districts around the Bosphorus and in the northern and central parts of the European side. The 277 millimetres measured in Beykoz was more than four times the city's average rainfall for the entire month of October.

The identities of those killed have laid bare the class divide in Turkey. In the Balat neighbourhood of Fatih, 14-year-old child worker Mahmut Işıldak was killed when he stepped into a puddle electrified by exposed cables in a car park. It later emerged that the car park had been operated for years without any oversight. In Ayazağa, in the Sarıyer district, a 34-year-old man died after falling while trying to cross through the floodwaters. The body of Murat Babajanov, a migrant worker from Turkmenistan, was found days later in the Golden Horn.

In Beykoz, 53-year-old construction worker Faik Şentürk was killed when he fell into a well while being made to pump out water that had collected on a school construction site. This happened during the very days when the governor was telling the public, "Do not go out unless absolutely necessary."

Despite warnings by meteorologists and token official appeals, millions of workers in the public and private sectors were forced to go to work. Schools closed only on October 15 and 16, after the disaster's scale had already become clear. While the well-to-do waited it out in secure luxury residences or left the city altogether, working people—those living in basement flats and along the streams, and those forced to go to work—bore the real cost of the disaster.

According to the Governor's Office, 19,300 emergency calls were received, and serious damage was recorded in some 2,000 homes and 900 workplaces. Metro stations, hospitals and shopping centres were flooded. The 10,000-lira "emergency assistance" the state handed out

to flood victims amounts to roughly one third of the monthly minimum wage. For a working-class family that has lost its home and savings, this is nothing short of a mockery.

Streams buried under concrete

Over the past several decades, more than 100 of Istanbul's streams and natural watercourses have been narrowed, covered over and used for construction. From Kağıthane to Alibeyköy and the Cendere Valley in Ayazağa, shopping malls, office towers, and luxury housing projects have blocked the natural paths of water. Factories built along the banks have turned these streambeds into dumping grounds for untreated waste. As concrete and asphalt seal the land, rainwater can no longer soak into the ground. Instead, it becomes a fast-moving torrent on the city's steep terrain.

Beginning in the late 1980s, a succession of zoning regulations transformed streambeds—already partially occupied by factories and informal housing—into legal construction plots. Stream protection zones were repeatedly narrowed. A 2013 regulatory change replaced the 100-metre no-build zone on either side of some stream sections with a mere 10-metre "maintenance strip." This process has accelerated enormously since Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power in 2002.

Of the roughly 470 emergency assembly areas designated after the 1999 Marmara earthquake, some 300 have been opened up for construction and turned into shopping malls, luxury residences and skyscrapers.

The Third Bosphorus Bridge, the new airport, and the construction that has sprung up around them have devastated the forests and water basins in the north of the city. The Istanbul Canal project—a planned artificial waterway running parallel to the Bosphorus and linking the Black Sea to the Sea of Marmara—also threatens the remaining basins. Mass housing developments are already surrounding the city's reservoirs.

Part of a global catastrophe

The Istanbul floods are part of a global climate catastrophe produced by the capitalist system. Fossil fuels have warmed the atmosphere,

which holds more moisture, making extreme rainfall more frequent and intense. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has established that human-induced warming is generating extreme weather events in every region of the world.

In July, monsoon floods and landslides in Bangladesh killed more than 50 people and affected over a million. In the United States, flash floods struck West Virginia and Texas. As Europe endured its third major heatwave of the summer, Sicily's temperatures reached 48.4 degrees Celsius. During June's Northern Hemisphere heatwave, an estimated 14,000 excess deaths occurred across six countries. In late August, glacier-fed floods on the Nepal–Tibet border caused widespread devastation. In Türkiye, temperatures exceeded 50 degrees Celsius for the first time in the summer of 2025, while wildfires killed at least 17 people and reduced more than 81,000 hectares of forest to ash.

The February 6, 2023 earthquakes that struck southern Türkiye and northern Syria are among the most striking recent examples of what the official “natural disaster” narrative conceals. The earthquakes centred on Kahramanmaraş killed more than 53,000 people in Türkiye and more than 8,000 in Syria. While the earthquake was a natural event, mass deaths were the result of capitalist policies. Scientists' warnings and countless official reports were ignored. Through measures such as the 2018 “zoning amnesty,” authorities legalised millions of poorly constructed buildings, prioritising profits over safe housing. As the *World Socialist Web Site* explained, tens of thousands of lives were sacrificed by a capitalist oligarchy that rejects any long-term infrastructure planning and investment, in favour of short-term profit. More than 20 million people in the Marmara region, including Istanbul, still live under the threat of an expected major earthquake.

The problem is not a lack of scientific knowledge or technical capacity. The obstacle to rational policies based on social need is the capitalist nation-state system, which subordinates every aspect of social life to private profit and market competition against international rivals.

According to the UN Environment Programme, governments plan to produce more than twice as much fossil fuel in 2030 as would be consistent with limiting warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius. The same governments that starve disaster preparedness and infrastructure of resources are pouring staggering sums into war. NATO, of which Türkiye is a member, is demanding that military spending rise to 5 per cent of national income by 2035.

COP31: The climate fraud in Antalya

Under these conditions, Türkiye will host the UN Climate Change Conference (COP31) in Antalya from November 9 to 20. Following a deal with Australia, the summit will be held in Türkiye, with Australia's Climate Minister Chris Bowen leading the negotiations. Türkiye's “COP31 President” is Murat Kurum, Minister of Environment, Urbanisation and Climate Change. Kurum was the AKP's candidate for mayor of Istanbul in the 2024 local elections and helped design the city's speculation-driven zoning policies. He was appointed five years before the 2023 earthquakes. Yet he refused to resign despite the toll of preventable mass deaths.

The record of the COP summits speaks for itself. Over the thirty summits since 1995, global emissions and temperatures have broken

record after record. The COP29 summit in Baku, Azerbaijan's capital, was attended by 1,773 registered fossil fuel lobbyists—70 per cent more than the combined delegations of the ten countries most vulnerable to the climate crisis. The final text of COP30 in Brazil did not even mention fossil fuels by name, though they are the main cause of the crisis.

These summits are not convened to resolve the climate crisis. Their purpose is to give a “green” veneer to the horse-trading between the imperialist powers and energy monopolies, to open up new avenues for profit such as carbon markets, and to convince the public that something is being done.

For a socialist solution

Decades of experience show that neither the flooding in Istanbul nor the danger posed by the next expected major earthquake in Turkey can be resolved through the empty promises of bourgeois parties, the central government, or the municipalities they control. No bourgeois party—including the Republican People's Party (CHP) and the New Party, which split from it—proposes to impinge on private property or profits on which the capitalist social order rests. As a result, millions of working people are abandoned to their fate as “individuals” in the face of disaster.

The construction monopolies, major real estate companies, banks and energy corporations must be expropriated and placed under the democratic control of the working class. Streambeds and assembly areas must be cleared of construction and reclaimed for society. Safe, free housing must be provided for all working people condemned to live in basement flats and unsafe buildings. The planning of cities, and of the economy as a whole, must be based on human need, not profit.

These demands can be realised only by mobilising the working class as an international force, to seize power and reorganise the world economy. The climate crisis and the resulting natural disasters that end in catastrophe are a global problem. They can be resolved only on a global scale, through the planning of production on a socialist basis. We call on all workers and young people who want to fight for this perspective to join and build the Sosyalist E?itlik Partisi – Dördüncü Enternasyonal (Socialist Equality Party – Fourth International).



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact