

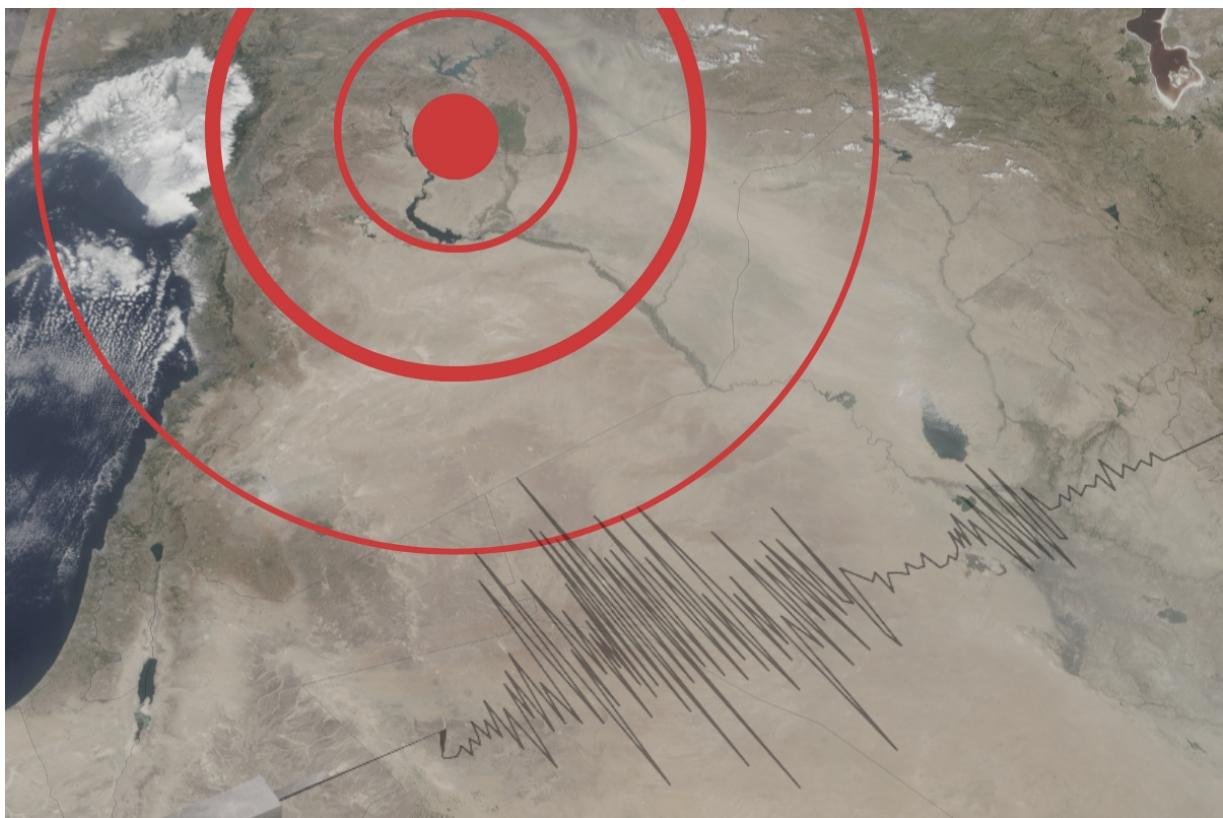


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Syria devastated again, ravaged by an earthquake

What we know about the calamity so far

al-Jumhuriya Collective



The number of people killed and injured by the earthquake that struck Syria and Turkey at dawn today, Monday 6 February 2023, is still expected to rise. Emergency teams in both countries continue to reach more affected areas.

The first earthquake, which struck south Turkey and

northern Syria from its center in Kahramanmaraş, was at a magnitude of 7.8 and caused numerous human losses and great destruction. The second was at a magnitude of 7.5 and struck the same area, at approximately 1:30 Damascus, Syria Time. The extent of damage and loss of lives caused by this earthquake is yet to be clear.

According to a provisional count published at noon, the number of victims from the first earthquake rose to 830 in Syria and 1,014 in Turkey, according to official, still inconclusive data issued by the Turkish Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD), as well as by the civil defense teams in northern Syria and Syrian regime's government. Anywhere between 337 and 404 deaths have been recorded in the cities and towns of northwestern Syria, with 371 deaths in the regime-controlled areas in the same region.

The Syrian Civil Defense has declared northwestern Syria a disaster-stricken area, calling upon all local authorities and civil forces to mobilize. It also appealed to all international humanitarian organizations to intervene quickly and provide relief to those afflicted. A statement issued by the Syrian Civil Defense called upon the international community to assume its responsibilities and take emergency measures to help Syrian civilians and alleviate the catastrophic aftermath of the earthquake. This can be achieved by applying pressure on the Assad regime and its Russian ally, ensuring cessation of hostilities in all afflicted areas. In an interview with Al Jazeera TV channel, the director of Syrian Civil Defense, Raed al-Saleh, stated that the rescue missions are seriously threatened by limited fuel supply, undermining their efforts as they try to pull those trapped under the rubble.

Rescue and extraction operations continue all across the Syrian governorates affected by the earthquake, amid serious fears of further collapse of new buildings as a result of damage or potential aftershocks. In this context, photos have been published by activists of collapsed housing units in the Kallasa neighborhood in Aleppo city and al-Atarib town in Aleppo's northern countryside.

The Turkish army declared the earthquake-affected areas an emergency zone, and the Turkish government called for urgent international assistance. Anadolu Agency quoted an assurance from the AFAD that "there is no danger of tsunami waves on the country's Mediterranean coast." There have been more than 100 aftershocks in Turkey and Syria, with degrees greater than 3 on the Richter scale, according to earthquake monitoring centers in Turkey.

What has been revealed this morning in Syria is horrible and gut-wrenching. Several weeks will pass before we can fully grasp the extent of the human, material, and economic damage this earthquake has inflicted on a country already ruined by war. With poor equipment and limited fuel supply, Syrian civil defense teams and humanitarian groups are working desperately, under severe weather conditions, to rescue those trapped under the rubble.

The international community and all stakeholders must immediately form a special humanitarian mechanism to address the consequences of the deadly earthquake in Syria. Rescue teams and makeshift hospitals are needed in the affected areas. The world must pressure all the powers controlling the Syrian borders to allow access of humanitarian assistance immediately, including the unconditional opening of the Syrian-Turkish border. All

parties in Syria, as well as their regional and international backers, must refrain from exploiting this disaster for military or political ends, and all efforts must focus on helping the Syrians affected by the earthquake.

Neighboring countries must provide assistance without discrimination or favoritism, and international organizations must reactivate the humanitarian programs that were paused due to insufficient funding, using local expertise and knowledge. Lastly, we call upon the Syrian diaspora and friends of the Syrian people to donate to trusted humanitarian organizations working on the ground, under harsh weather conditions and following a decade of conflict, so that medical assistance and shelter can be provided to the affected families.