

Morocco Unites in the Aftermath of the Earthquake

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Brief Analysis

In the wake of the devastating earthquake, an outpouring of solidarity and social mobilization has taken place in the country at a grassroots level. The complexity of the situation from a logistical and geographical standpoint helps explain Morocco’s reluctance to indiscriminately accept all international aid offers.

This week, Morocco witnessed the most powerful and deadliest earthquake since 1960 in Agadir. The earthquake, the result of a shallow, inclined fault that lies beneath the High Atlas mountain range, struck Al-Haouz Province on September 8, 2023 at 23:11 local time, registering a magnitude of 6.8 on the Richter scale. The epicenter was located near the Ighil commune, approximately 71.8 km (44.6 miles) southwest of Marrakech, but was felt by city residents of Agadir, Casablanca, Rabat, Mohammedia and beyond.

The earthquake left more than 2,900 dead and 5,000 injured, with the majority of casualties in Al-Haouz, Taroudant, and Chichaoua provinces. The World Health Organization estimates that approximately 300,000 people in Marrakech and the surrounding areas have been affected by the catastrophe. Additionally, numerous buildings and historical landmarks were affected in cities like Marrakech, Taroudant, and Agadir.

Immediate Response

Under His Majesty King Mohammed VI’s directives, the Royal Court announced a three day period of national mourning while immediately establishing a ministerial committee to develop a program for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of damaged homes. His Majesty King Mohammed VI issued royal directives to provide immediate assistance to those in dire situations, especially orphans, with the provision of food, water, clothing, and temporary housing in the affected areas. Simultaneously, royal orders were issued to bolster search teams to expedite rescue and evacuation operations for the wounded. Teams were directed to prepare for an urgent assessment of the conditions of residential neighborhoods in the affected towns in order to determine the feasibility of residents’ return and the scope of repairs on homes that are currently uninhabitable.

Under His Majesty’s orders, The Royal Moroccan Armed Forces confirmed the deployment of specialized intervention units—including search and rescue teams and field hospitals—to the affected areas, as well as the commencement of relief aid delivery to the earthquake affected areas. The Secretary-General of the General Directorate of Internal Affairs stated that officials, including security teams, are pooling resources to provide the necessary assistance to assess and document the damages. Civil protection units along with local rescuers worked on clearing the roads of debris to facilitate the access of ambulances and relief vehicles to the affected areas after they faced difficulties due to road congestion and blockage in the mountainous regions caused by fallen rocks.

A Domestic Wave of Support

In the wake of the devastating earthquake, an outpouring of solidarity and social mobilization has taken place in the country at a grassroots level. Moroccans from various walks of life, including civil society activists, human rights advocates, and community members, have come together to support the earthquake-affected areas, particularly those in remote mountainous regions. In cities like Rabat, Casablanca, and Tangier, tens of thousands of Moroccans answered the authorities' calls to address the urgent need for blood donations. Notably, members of the Moroccan national football team and the team coach Walid Regragui, who were preparing for a match against Liberia as part of the African Cup of Nations qualifiers (later canceled due to the earthquake), donated blood and called for solidarity with the victims. The Director of the General Directorate of National Security likewise appealed to all security sector personnel to donate blood, especially in the affected areas.

Grassroots initiatives were launched to transport food, water, blankets, and medicines to the affected villages, especially those that had not yet received assistance. This spontaneous and widespread solidarity has not only provided crucial aid to the affected areas but has also highlighted Moroccans' humanitarian values in times of crisis. The ongoing outpouring of support is a testament to the unity of the Moroccan people and has transformed the rescue and relief efforts into a source of national pride.

This collective response has garnered deserved praise internationally, emphasizing Morocco's willingness to address the tragedy with its own resources and the support of its people. International media has begun to highlight the impressive unity among Moroccans, and it is expected that this wave of support will continue to grow as substantial aid shipments arrive from various Moroccan cities.

Facilitating Monetary Assistance

Significant philanthropic steps also emerged in response to the earthquake. Under the high instructions of His Majesty King Mohammed VI, the government established a **dedicated bank account (** to collect contributions and donations for earthquake relief. In addition to these official efforts, numerous NGOs and organizations have launched campaigns to collect funds and assistance. Furthermore, the Moroccan parliament's Finance and Economic Development Committees established a dedicated treasury account for relief, aligning with the legal framework for such accounts outlined in the Moroccan constitution and Finance Law. This specialized account will play a pivotal role in coordinating resources for immediate relief, rehabilitation, and reconstruction efforts in earthquake-affected regions. It demonstrates Morocco's commitment to effectively respond to natural disasters and enhance its disaster management capabilities.

The General Directorate of National Security and the General Directorate for Territorial Surveillance in Morocco have announced a philanthropic contribution of 50 million Moroccan Dirhams (\$5 million) to the special fund for voluntary solidarity contributions. Several Moroccan banks waived the usual transfer fee citizens making donations to the special bank account. Banks like Banque Populaire and CIH Bank chose not to charge transfer fees, potentially influenced by Bank Al-Maghrib's early stance on this matter.

Managing International Efforts

Following the news of the tragedy in Morocco, offers of assistance also poured in from around the world. A statement from the Ministry of Interior on Sunday announced that Morocco had "responded, at this stage, to offers of support from friendly countries: Spain, Qatar, the United Kingdom, and the United Arab Emirates." These teams have since been in direct contact with their Moroccan counterparts. In addition, teams from Israel, Tunisia, and Senegal arrived on Sunday to assist local efforts in search and rescue efforts. Offers of support also came from countries such as the United States, Tunisia, Turkey, and others.

The government has tailored its response to the international aid offers to its current needs and capacities. While some sources have depicted this response as a rejection of foreign assistance, the limited number of international rescue teams on the ground likely reflect the complexities of logistics and organization in this region. Accepting aid isn't just a matter of receiving goods and distributing them among the needy; it requires a well-coordinated approach involving logistical and organizational provisions to facilitate the smooth functioning of aid operations. Such efforts involve substantial groundwork and resources, which might not be readily available, especially amidst the crisis situation local authorities are facing at this moment.

Without a comprehensive assessment of the damage and the actual needs to guide responses to international assistance, there is a risk of ending up with a massive amount of unnecessary items and displaced staff that further complicate rather than assist the crisis management process. Amidst logistical issues, road blockades, and lack of sufficient transportation links, it would be difficult to accommodate a large number of foreign rescue teams and transport them to the affected areas without delaying the ongoing search and rescue efforts. Moreover, the geography of the affected areas is particularly challenging to navigate and would require unacquainted personnel a significant amount of time to familiarize themselves and successfully traverse the mountainous geography of the region. The complexity of the situation from a logistical and geographical standpoint helps explain Morocco's reluctance to indiscriminately accept all international aid offers. Nevertheless, the government has proclaimed its openness to further international aid contingents in response

to any changes to the current situation and after careful assessments. ❖

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