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People in Central Mexico Face Earthquake's Grim Aftermath

20/09/2017



Millions are sleeping outdoors in blacked-out streets, anxious about loved ones and frightened by the danger of aftershocks.

The people of Mexico City and its surrounding regions continue to reel from the 7.1-magnitude earthquake that struck the state of Puebla as the complete scale of the disaster is yet to be revealed.

Arriving less than two weeks after a magnitude-8.1 temblor struck off the shore of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, the quake caused apartment blocks, industrial buildings and highways to crumble, trapping countless people in the wreckage.

The quake was felt across central Mexico, from the capital's central Zocalo — where the flag was still flying half-staff in commemoration of the 98 killed by the September 7 earthquake — to cities and towns across neighboring states.

High-school student Gaby Palacios told teleSUR that she was standing at the entrance to her school in the city of Cautla, Morelos — a mere 65 kilometers from the epicenter near the Puebla state town of Raboso — when the earthquake struck.

She said that she was frozen by shock then ran with a friend into the center of the street, where they hugged each other. The neighborhoods surrounding her school and home, where she lives with her mother, were hit hard.

“There was a lot of damage,” Palacios said. “Walls, houses and some parts of old buildings such as churches and museums collapsed.”

As she returned to her neighborhood, she noticed dozens of injured people being treated by ambulances and emergency personnel. When she finally arrived home, her mother cried in relief.

Cuautla, along with dozens of cities and towns across the region, is now suffering from widespread power outages, with phone signals also down. Palacios and her mother remain indoors, huddled around candle-light as an eerie silence blankets her community.

Classes have been suspended across several states in central Mexico.

Mexico City, a sprawling megalopolis, is the most populous urban center in the world. It also sits in a highly earthquake-prone area that lies alongside the Trans-Mexican Volcanic Belt. Built atop the ruins of the ancient Aztec capital Tenochtitlan and the bed of the long-drained Lake Texcoco, the ground beneath structures quivers violently in seismic events, amplifying the force of earthquakes by 100 times or more, according to seismologists.

The quake came on the precise anniversary of the 1985 temblor that devastated the city and killed over 5,000 people. Since then, Mexico City has ostensibly pursued development focusing on gentrification and erecting earthquake-resistant structures. Nonetheless, the city was blindsided by Tuesday's quake, which even managed to evade the country's famous alert system.

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