



[Negligence and Politics Contribute to the Death Toll in Morocco](#)

By Colin Bailey

This past Friday, on the 8th of September, a magnitude 6.8 level earthquake hit Morocco, now recognized as the strongest earthquake to hit the region in over 50 years. As of the 12th of September, the death toll has amassed nearly 3,000 individuals, with another 10,000 individuals missing as rescue efforts enter their fourth day. Despite the scale of destruction, the Moroccan government has been slow to accept offers of foreign aid, having only accepted the aid from a select few nations.

The epicenter of the earthquake has been determined to have occurred in the Al Haouz province, 72 kilometers southwest of the city of Marrakech in the High Atlas Mountains, at approximately 11:11 p.m. local time. Due to the landslides and overall destruction of infrastructure, it has been challenging for rescuers to reach several rural and underdeveloped villages.

Earthquakes are not new to Morocco, located along the Azores-Gibraltar fault line along the Alboran Sea; earthquakes in Northern Morocco are not unusual. As such, Northern Morocco's buildings must meet codes to withstand significant earthquakes. As the High Atlas Mountains are not prone to severe earthquakes, buildings were not constructed to meet similar standards, leaving Al Haouz largely ill-equipped for the crisis. Alongside this, there is immense inequality between the developed cities and the rural villages, having less access to healthcare and medicine due to government policies. One of Morocco's most significant sources of income comes from the tourism and agricultural industries, both of which are localized in the fertile northern provinces, leaving the rest of the country neglected. This is the primary reason why Western Sahara has been pushing to be a sovereign nation for decades.

Wendy Bohon, an earthquake geologist from Maryland, has said, "If you don't have earthquakes a lot, you don't build to withstand them. So, the types of buildings in Morocco are not built to withstand strong shaking from the base. And so, they are very likely to collapse." An estimated 95% of the deaths in this natural disaster are believed to have resulted from people being crushed by collapsing buildings. Further casualties were caused by the poor infrastructure. The roadways throughout the High Atlas Mountains are over 30 years old on average, with limited sources of electricity, all of which have crumbled in the earthquake.

Despite the region being unprepared for such a tragedy, the Moroccan government has been reluctant to accept foreign aid. In a statement Sunday by the Moroccan Interior Ministry, it was stated that search and rescue teams would only be accepted by Great Britain, Qatar, Spain, and the United Arab Emirates, which were dubbed "friendly countries." Numerous countries, including Germany, Italy, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, France, and the United States, have not yet been approved by the Moroccan government to provide aid.

The reason for the limited acceptance of relief appears to be the Moroccan government's prioritization of maintaining complete control over the rescue efforts. As it stands right now, the Moroccan government oversees all levels of project management regarding providing relief and is unwilling to give up any level of supervision.

Another reason why Morocco is not accepting aid from certain countries, specifically France, is because of the horrors they endured under colonial rule. Morocco has denied French rescue groups access despite continued pressure. In a statement, French President Emmanuel Macron addressed the refusal to receive aid, stating, "There is the possibility of supplying humanitarian aid directly. It is clearly up to his majesty the king and the Moroccan government, in a manner entirely befitting their sovereignty, to organize international aid." France is not alone in expressing dismay over not being permitted access to Morocco, with Germany and Czechia making similar statements pressuring the urgency of a swift response. With the electric grid and roads destroyed, it is difficult for any assistance to reach the villages.

The decision to limit foreign aid is not without its defenders; Caroline Holt of the International Federation of the Red Cross agreed with Morocco, stating that the situation was "extremely complex." Due to most of the destruction located high in the underdeveloped High Atlas Mountains, it is challenging for teams to reach these villages with roads destroyed and, in many instances, entirely blocked off because of landslides. In these situations, it does not matter how much extra equipment and rescuers you have if you still aren't able to reach the victims. Moroccan officials have further claimed that they fear that many foreign groups would lead to discoordination and "would be counterproductive."

While there are indeed risks with executing a project between a multitude of groups in a humanitarian crisis like the one Morocco is currently facing, the benefits of international cooperation outweigh the costs of management complications. The Turkish government met a similar concern in the wake of the destructive earthquake in February of this year. Within the first 24 hours of the disaster, over 30 countries worldwide sent humanitarian relief teams, saving hundreds of civilian lives. And within 72 hours, over 90 nations had contributed in sending relief in what has gone down as a historic feat of crisis relief efforts. For that aid to have worked as effectively as it had, Turkey and Syria had to allow foreign organizations to enter and operate within their country.

The decision to limit the amount of foreign aid in this humanitarian crisis is a choice that has undoubtedly cost the lives of several civilians who were unable to be reached in time. While the Moroccan government would lose direct control over certain aspects of management, a great deal of benefits would be felt by a larger workforce. Right now, local hospitals in Al Haouz are overcrowded, with many people being forced to wait outside for medical attention. This problem would be alleviated if more resources were available to foreign organizations.