Haiti Struck by Earthquake in 2010

A major earthquake struck southern Haiti on Tuesday, January 12, 2010 at 4:53 pm. The magnitude of the earthquake was 7.0. on the Rector scale. This is the strongest earthquake to hit Haiti since 1770. The location of the epicenter of the earthquake was 15 miles southwest of the capital city of Port-au-Prince. Severe damage and casualties occurred in the Port-au-Prince area.

The Republic of Haiti occupies the western part of the island of Hispaniola. The Dominican Republic occupies the eastern part of the same island. Hispaniola is one of the Greater Antilles islands and is situated in the Caribbean Ocean between Puerto Rico and Cuba.

In addition to damages in the Port-au-Prince area, the earthquake caused damages throughout Haiti and the Dominican Republic. It was felt nearby in the Turks and Caicos Islands, southeastern Cuba, eastern Jamaica, in parts of Puerto Rico and the Bahamas. It was felt as far away as Tampa, Florida and Caracas, Venezuela. Aftershocks were felt for over a week after the initial quake.

The earthquake was located at a depth of 8.1 miles below the surface of the earth and occurred in an area where two separate tectonic plates meet. They are the Caribbean tectonic plate and the North America tectonic plate. This area is called the Enriquillo-Plantain Garden fault system. This fault system has not produced a major earthquake in recent decades.

Since the earthquake water and food in the area have been scarce. The majority of buildings that are still standing are damaged and could collapse with an aftershock or use. People have been forced to sleep outdoors in make shift camps. Many survivors were left with no other possession than the clothing on their backs. Most local hospitals were destroyed or unsafe and medical supplies and doctors scarce. According to the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) approximately 600,000 people have been left homeless in and around Port-au-Prince.

The government and volunteers from the Dominican Republic were the first to bring aid to Haiti. Troops and medical staff from countries across the globe, including the United States, traveled to the area to help survivors. In the week following the earthquake hundreds of survivors, trapped under the rubble of collapsed buildings, were rescued.
The government's figure, released by the United Nations ten days after the initial earthquake, placed the death toll from the disaster as 111,481 people confirmed dead. As of Friday, January 22, the Haitian government officially ended the search-and-rescue phase of its response to the disaster. This is the worst death toll from an earthquake since the 2004 Asian tsunami. It is the second-highest death toll from an earthquake in over three decades, according to the U.S. Geological Survey. The confirmed death toll is expected to rise as clean-up and reconstruction phase begin.

The world responded to the plight of the people of Haiti. Millions of dollars were collected for relief and recovery by various agencies including the Red Cross and UNICEF immediately following the disaster. Ten days after the quake a two-hour "Hope for Haiti Now" telethon featuring musical performances by top acts and a phone bank staffed by dozens of celebrities raised money. Proceeds from the telethon benefit Oxfam America, Partners in Health, the Red Cross, UNICEF, the U.N. World Food Programme, the Yele Haiti Foundation and the Clinton Bush Haiti Foundation. By January 23, 2010, just eleven days after the earthquake, over $575 million had been collected by worldwide agencies such as UNICEF, World Food Program.

Discussion Points

1. What role do the tectonic plates play in earthquake?

2. Why do you think the death toll was so high for the 2010 earthquake in Haiti?

3. What are some of the threats to life of any natural disaster?

4. How does the type of building construction in an area impact the number of deaths in an earthquake?

5. What do you think of the humanitarian actions people and countries have taken for Haiti since the earthquake?
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Vocabulary

magnitude
epicenter
casualty
Greater Antilles
tectonic plate
fault system
decade
survivors
collapsed
possessions
humanitarian
coordination
approximately
search-and-rescue
phase
scarce
Rector scale
tsunami
reconstruction
plight
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Questions

1. The magnitude of the earthquake that hit Haiti was _______________________.

2. How far was the epicenter from the capital city of Port-au-Prince and in what direction? ____________________________

3. Describe the location of Haiti ____________________________

4. Why did people sleep and live outdoors after the earthquake? ____________________________

5. What country is closest to Haiti? ____________________________

6. How many confirmed deaths were reported a week after the earthquake? ____________________________

7. Why is that number expected to change as the clean-up and reconstruction start? ____________________________

8. Name four humanitarian agencies that have raised money and sent aid to Haiti. ____________________________

9. The death toll in Haiti is the worse since what other natural disaster? ____________________________

10. Approximately how much aid money had been raised for Haiti eleven days after the earthquake by the people of the world? ____________________________