

BUILDING JUSTICE PODCAST



CRISJ Building Justice Podcast

Season 2, Episode 22 : The Catastrophic Earthquakes in Syria and Turkey

Guests: Zoya Altabaa, Amar F., and Vasiliy Derebenskiy, Sac State Students

Please note: This transcript may be imperfect. Please contact Zoya Altabaa directly should you have questions.

Music lyrics:

Company under construction, the function, justice for the human family we demand it. Justice, true freedom, equality is a must. Thus, decolonization of the planet. So bust this. People be the power now we're Building Justice. Pulling out divinations, now we're Building Justice. Welcome the planet to the Podcast, "Building Justice," "Building Justice," "Building Justice." Building is to add on, or to do away with

Amar: Welcome to Building Justice, a podcast by Sacramento State's Center on Race, Immigration and Social Justice (CRISJ) . We explore critical issues affecting our communities with the hopes of creating a healthier and more just world. We explore critical issues affecting our communities with the hopes of creating a healthier and more just world. I'm Amar F. and I'm freshman undergraduate here at Sacramento State, and I'm here with

Zoya. I'm Zoya Altabaa, and I'm a freshman undergraduate studying journalism.

Vasiliy: Hello. My name is Vasiliy Derbebenskiy and I'm a junior in the mechanical engineering program at California State University, Sacramento.

1:05

Amar: Today, we'll be talking about the catastrophic earthquake that struck Syria and Turkey. The day is March 10, 2023. It has been 35 days since the catastrophic earthquake that occurred on February 6, 2023, at 4:17 a.m., killing more than 50,000 people.

Vasiliy: (1:24): A powerful 7.8 magnitude earthquake and its aftershocks struck parts of Turkey and Syria on Monday, February the sixth, killing thousands and causing major structural and economic damage, according to local authorities. The shock occurred at 4:17 a.m. local time on Monday and was 11 miles below the surface of the town of [NAME OF TOWN] in Turkey. The United States Geological Survey Agency said. And a second 7.5 magnitude earthquake occurred at 1:24 p.m. local time. Only a few hours later. Near the town of [NAME OF TOWN] Turkey. Earthquake struck along the eastern Anatolian fault zone, a region near the junction of the Anatolia, Arabia and African plates, according to the USGS. Two weeks later, another 6.4 magnitude earthquake shook the southern Turkish province of [NAME OF TOWN] just after 8 p.m. local time, according to Turkey's disaster management agency. It was followed by several tremors, including one of magnitude 5.8 in the same region minutes later.

Amar: Because of these earthquakes and aftershocks, more than 84,000 buildings have either been severely damaged, collapsed or need urgent demolition, according to officials. 14 million people, about 16% of Turkey's population were affected. Development experts from the United Nations estimated that one and a half million people were left homeless. And as of March 6, 2023, more than 52,800 deaths were confirmed. Estimating more than 46,100 in Turkey and more than 6700 in Syria. So, Vasily, can you please explain to us the more technical aspect of the earthquake and what happened and how it occurred?

(3:09) Vasiliy: Tectonic plates are massive slabs of rock on the Earth's crust, located anywhere from ten miles to 106 miles thick, but are always slowly moving. Earthquakes occur along the boundaries of these plates, according to the USGS. A slip strike movement occurs when tectonic plates fly past each other. In the case of the Turkey/Syria earthquake, three tectonic plates are sliding past each other along an existing fault zone in the southern and central Turkey region. A triple junction is just that much more complicated because there are three plates meeting at the same spot, and it was located in an area where a lot of traffic goes up over time. The East Anatolian fault, where the 7.8 magnitude earthquake occurred slipped by nearly 10.5 feet while the [NAME] fault. Where the 7.5 aftershock earthquake occurred slid by nearly 36 feet, according to analysis by a USGS.

(4:14) Zoya: Would you be able to explain as well why have many buildings collapsed?

Vasiliy: Yes, the vast destruction that occurred was partly the result of something called liquification, a phenomenon in which the intense shaking turn of the soil underneath buildings, foundations into a near liquid state. Liquification is especially a problem in areas with a high water table near waterways, ports and rivers. If you were not aware, Turkey is surrounded by two major bodies of water the Mediterranean Sea and Black Sea. Liquification, causing the

ground to fail and break apart at any kind of non-uniform ground deformation is very damaging to the structures above.

4:55 Zoya: Thank you possibly for explaining a little more on the technical aspect of what has happened. Now, could you please explain a little more on what does this mean for the people that have been affected and how they're living right now?

Amar: Yeah, so about 2 million, 2 million survivors have been housed in temporary accommodations or evacuated from the earthquake devastated region. And hundreds of thousands of children and their families are homeless in the wake of the earthquake. Snow and bitter winter weather have placed children at greater risk of hypothermia as they struggle to survive in subzero temperatures. And many survivors have had to sleep in cars outside or in makeshift shelters. Doctors have also warned that children are also at risk of exposure to waterborne diseases, such as chorea or hepatitis A, due to the damage to shelters and water infrastructure. Joanne **Mudge**, director of World Vision Syria Crisis Response, says that humanitarian needs were already extremely severe in northwest Syria and that this catastrophic earthquake has just added trauma to the ongoing crisis over there. Health facilities were already at capacity and were badly equipped and unable to cope with the need. But now many have even been destroyed. So families are trying to survive with no homes, no access to food and very cold weather, while also attempting to deal with the physical and mental impact of this earthquake as well as a decade of war

6:33 Zoya: Going off of what you said, right now, also the idea that basically banks are not trusted in Syria and because many people have gone to Turkey illegally, they don't have the right paperwork to put their money in banks. And I know that many people in Turkey don't also rely on banks much. So---especially that the center of the earthquake was in **Name of City**, which is the place that many Syrians have immigrated to illegally. So many people have not even used banks to put their money in there. And so when when the buildings collapsed on the people's heads, many have also lost their money inside of their homes. So even if you were lucky enough to get out alive, you you you basically had no financial support because all your money had been lost in the earthquake.

7:22 Amar: Yeah. And so adding on to what Zoya said, basically you're left with nothing. If you were lucky enough to get out, you're starting your life all over again. And for the people that did flee to from Syria to **name of City** they fled to start a new life for themselves and get away from the war.

7:29 Vasiliy: I do have a follow up question. You mentioned that people had very little belongings. They don't trust the bank. Most of the time they're keeping their valuables in their homes. Did this caused people to run back into their home during this crisis?

8:08 Zoya: Okay. So there's multiple ways we could look at this. But I mean, there are many perspectives that we could look at this from. But one thing that is important for us to mention is the idea that people are hurt. So if you were able to get out of this earthquake after your house

has been collapsed on top of your head, you are severely injured. So you are not going to be able to go back and then move rubble up and then try to get your belongings out of there. Other than that, we could also look at the perspective that there are 12 story buildings that have fell on top of the people's heads. And what's very common in Syria and Turkey, they don't build houses like here in America. Their houses are more like six stories long minimum you would find in Turkey I've seen 12, 13 stories. And so if you if you were living, for example, on the six story building, there's little to no chance that you would find your belongings. And so having adding that, adding that to the idea that you're unable to move anything because you're severely injured, there's literally little to no possibility that you would be able to do that. Other than that, you need really professional equipment to go to this. And in Syria, this equipment is not really found. In Turkey, I think they would rather use this equipment to get people out rather than get people's belongings out. So and so and so because people are severely injured and because there is no professional equipment and because the buildings are so high, people were left with nothing overall, even if they were trying to go back and get their belongings back. It's it's something that it's almost close to impossible to happen.

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10:08 Vasily :Thinking about the coverage of the disaster in Turkey and Syria, I ran into a fellow student before recording his podcast and I told him about this particular podcast episode regarding the Turkey and Syria earthquakes, and he just had no idea about it. Why has there been such little coverage of this humanitarian disaster?

10:33 Amar: So I think that's just one of the most devastating things that's come out of this earthquake, is the lack of attention that it's received. While it was a national disaster and couldn't have been prevented. There are so many things that could have been done to prevent the number of people that died. The silence and lack of attention that countries around the world showed especially powerful ones like America, speaks loudly and clearly to how important they think the crisis was, or perhaps how unimportant the lives of Syrian and Turkish citizens are. The first 72 hours after a disaster are crucial and response must begin during that time to save lives. I believe that Western media is very powerful and can be put to good use. However, time and time again, when it comes to countries in the Middle East like Syria, they tend to be ignored. Only after the numbers rose that countries start to help. Children and families were stuck under the rubble in the freezing cold with no food and water, yelling to their loved ones to see if they were still alive. And the harsh reality is that people in Syria and Turkey are just not seen as equal to humans in the West and European world. I really don't understand why my American citizenship makes me more important than people that live in Syria and Turkey and in third world countries. Syria has been in an ongoing war for the past decade and it was already dire from a humanitarian standpoint. And the minute that the earthquake struck, people had already been displaced. Before the earthquake, many were already homeless, living in tents, in camps. And when the earthquake struck on February 6th at 4:17 a.m., it became a crisis within a crisis. And we've already seen that there has been no coverage. Many people don't even know about the ongoing war that's been in Syria. And as a Syrian American, it pained me and it still pains me to see the lack of attention that people have received and are still not receiving.

And so after hearing about what happened, seeing videos where children are being pulled out with blood all over them, a baby pulled out with her umbilical cord still connected to her dead mother, a father that survived but later died because he couldn't bear the thought that he was the only one left out of his whole family. I truly couldn't help but feel helpless. My tears were not going to save anyone. It was unbearable and just hard to look at. And it became hard to sleep in my warm bed knowing that families were were out in the cold with a lack of supplies, medics and rescuers.

(13:16) It really shocked me and surprised me to see that my classmates were able to continue on with their daily lives, not knowing the crisis that happened. And one of the like I feel like this this earthquake hit, I wouldn't have found out about this earthquake if my sister, who lives just a couple of hours from the epicenter, didn't tell me. And I when she told me I couldn't bear the thought of losing her, my my sadness turned into anger. And I was angry that it took so long for people to help. Like I said, the first 2 hours after a disaster are crucial and response must begin during that time to save lives. So why were we so late to act? All I can imagine is how many people could have survived if we gave it the attention that it deserved.

This is a humanitarian issue, not a political one. And when the war in Ukraine happened not too long ago, America was so, so quick to help send aid and money. And lawmakers were able to pass bills very quickly. After Russia's invasion of Ukraine he U.S. received more than 100,000 Ukrainians fulfilling President Biden's pledge of providing a temporary safe haven to the displaced as part of the largest refugee exodus. And most of them have arrived with temporary permission to stay in the country, according to the government data. So it's important to see and note the different treatment that Syria received. A war torn country that's recently come to a natural disaster was pledged with about 85 million for Turkey and Syria. So for two countries, not one. And while the help given from a powerful country is needed. It seems like, to be honest, a joke ,comparing it to the help that Ukraine has received. The U.S. sent \$150 billion to Ukraine, but only 85 million to Turkey in Syria.

Music

(15:29) Amar: So I talked a little bit about my classmates and their reaction and how and how they didn't know anything about what was going on. Can you talk to us about your experience, what the reaction of students around you?

(15:43) Zoya: Yes. So basically, since I'm a journalism major, as I mentioned at the start of the podcast, I've expected, honestly, a lot of people to talk about this, like before I went to my classes. But I was surprised that none of my classmates even knew anything about it until I raised my hand and started talking about it. And then my instructor started explaining a little bit more. However, we went over the topic very briefly. Although my classes are mostly like news writing classes. I was just very shocked at the idea that, you know, many of the classmates didn't even know anything about it, didn't even read anything on the news about it in those classes. For me, we we are required to have like a reading news reading every week. And so we're required to be very aware of the news that's happening. And so, just the idea that my classmates didn't even pay

attention to something as important as that just really made me feel sad and not important at the same time. Like it just felt like, okay, the media is picking and choosing what they want to talk about. But also like there were a couple of articles that were written about it and the idea that my classmates didn't even choose to read about those things because it just felt like, "Oh, in the Middle East, there's always like war that's happening. It's nothing new", you know, nothing important. It just made me feel like, okay, I'm not that important, you know, as an individual.

(17:10) On the other hand, we would have discussions about Ukraine and what's happening because we would have questions about this mostly every week in our tests and quizzes about the news. It was like we would go into like some type of discussion about it or we would we would talk about the details. So it's kind of ,as I said, it just made me feel like I'm not that important. And so my instructor have also explained that the media, the Western media is just very focused on itself, like me, basically focused on the European type of media on the west side of the media. However, it just it's kind of made me feel like, okay, this is not a war that maybe we can pick and choose what we want to talk about. It's it's a natural disaster that have caused many lives. And so, like it caused us to lose many, many lives. Is it still not important for the media to portray it? Is it is it really not that important? Is the Middle Eastern or or, you know, that side of the world not important to the Western media? It just started like raising lots of questions in my mind about it.

(18:29) Amar: Thank you, Zoya, for sharing your experience in your classes and what you witnessed. Can you also share examples of kids experiences? And what they went through.

(18:50) Zoya: There were many kids that have lost their lives in this disaster. For example, there were kids who were born under the rubble and there were kids begging to get out. There were kids who had no problem putting their freedom, their freedom just to get out of the rubble. There was no families left for those kids. Now they're all orphans. And also just the idea of kids being kidnaped from the hospitals as well, which is something that's just been really common. All of these things, I feel like they just meant like nothing to them just because it was on the other side of this of this world that seemed to the Western media as if it's a world that's just full of war. And this is just something that's very normal and it's not important for us to talk about. So this kind of made me think about the idea that if media coverage was late and liked, what kind of aid was the international community able to give to those people?

(19:55) Vasiliy: Great question. The World Health Organization said it delivered 72 metric tons of trauma and emergency supplies to Turkey and Syria and launched an \$85 million appeal to support earthquake response in the two countries. Syrian officials say that about half of the more than 200 planes carrying earthquake aid for the country have come from the United Arab Emirates. The United Arab Emirates had 119 flights to Syria, airing over 4000 tons of aid, dispatched a search and rescue team and allocated more than \$100 million in relief assistance. Turkey has accepted help from more than 100 countries since the earthquake struck, including rescue teams and relief workers from the United States, Russia and Ukraine. Rescue workers and volunteers from Turkey's traditional frozen rivals like Greece and Armenia also flew in to help. Saudi Arabia announced humanitarian projects worth about \$49 million for the earthquake affected people in Turkey and Syria, including the establishment of 3000 housing units and sponsorship of orphans of earthquake victims.

(21:03)Amar: So this kind of makes me also wonder how will the economies of the region be affected?

(21:14) Vasiliy: Another great question. Economic losses from the recent earthquakes in Turkey are likely to top \$25 billion, while losses covered by insurance could surpass \$5 billion. New estimates from Moody's RMS show. For those who may not know, Moody's, Moody's Corp. is an American financial services company that houses the holding company for Moody's Investors Service and Moody's Analytics. Moody's Investors Services provides investors with credit ratings, risk analysis and research for stocks, bonds and government entities. The Moody's RMS are substantially lower than a recent projection by the Turkish Enterprise and Business Confederation. The Confederation said earlier this month the earthquakes have probably caused about \$84 billion in losses, equivalent to about 10% of Turkey's entire economic output last year. But Moody's estimates covered damages to buildings and contents and business interruption. They do not take into account some other costs, such as damage to transport and utility infrastructure. These estimates only apply to losses in Turkey and don't cover neighboring Syria. The catastrophic risk modeling unit of Moody's said. Wow.

(22:29)Amar: So hearing what you just said, how long do you think it will take the affected countries to get back to normal?

(22:34) Vasiliy: Days after Turkey's worst earthquake in modern history, President Erdogan vowed to rebuild a southern disaster zone within a year, an undertaking conservative estimates, put it at \$45 billion. Another is expected to be far higher. I don't think anyone has an exact date and the rebuild could last many more years.

(22:54) Zoya: So is there any idea on how the community helping each other in terms of food and health care?

(23:02) Vasiliy: After this month's earthquakes, many of its eateries switched to simpler, fairer coffee. Thousands of people across the devastated region. Scores of restaurants, cafes and street food vendors join spontaneous efforts to feed the city of about 2 million people and its neighbors, immediately after the February six earthquakes. Cooks and bakers swap their specialties for cauldrons containing lentil soup and potato stew, cooking local food for local people. Chefs flew in from around Turkey and the world to join the effort. Miami based chef Carla oversaw some 25 volunteers to prepare and distribute about 35,000 meals a day. In sites across the province. It is one of eight such cook houses established across Turkey by world Central Kitchen of Washington, DC. Unfortunately, the food market is shaken and it will likely take 3 to 6 months months to get back to usual.

(23:59) Unfortunately, when it comes to health care, emergency services broke down in this stricken province immediately following the earthquake. All the hospitals, but one were damaged and unusable. The total number of nonfunctional hospitals in the earthquake zone is still unclear. More than 15 hospitals were taken out of use due to the earthquake, according to the Turkish Medical Association. At least two hospitals collapsed onto their patients [causing] death.

Rushing to treat the injured and others. Authorities and private organizations are setting up clinics and hospitals and health in schools and even on boats to replace the dozens of health care facilities that were either destroyed or damaged by the quake. Supplies of medicines and equipment are being rebuilt after a significant amount of stock were lost in the earthquake. One of 32 fully equipped field hospitals and some 110 emergency response units have been set up, according to the Health Ministry, including those that have come from other countries. Turkey's National Health Service also said that it would cover all health expenditure for earthquake victims.

(24:59) Zoya: This also kind of makes me think about like the trauma that that was caused by the effect by the event. So basically the fear that people now have so like thinking that they could die any moment. I was having this conversation with my cousin the other day about, like, he lives in Turkey and the earthquake was really close to him. And he was telling me how they would go to sleep and they would close their eyes and in their mind they know that they might not open them and they might not see their families again. So they would say goodbye to their families before they would go to sleep, knowing that they may not see them anymore. Also that he's told, he talk to me about how they're preparing their kids for this so they would have like a table in the middle of the house and so that they teach their kids in the house because they had little kids, that whenever we felt like the earth is shaking or anything like that, we would run under that table.

It's just, and so, it's just kind of shocking to me because, you know, kids at this age shouldn't should learn how to, you know, enjoy life, learn how to play, maybe go to school as well. But instead, they're learning how to save their lives at such a young age. You know, they're they're learning about saying goodbye to their parents before they go to sleep instead of like, oh, let's go to sleep. And then tomorrow we'll play again, you know? So it just this idea makes me feel like. Really sad, but also it kind of makes me feel like we should do something about this. And so we should start thinking about what are some ways we can spread awareness and how can we donate and to who?

(26:47) Amar: So the first step is to acknowledge these events and talk about them on social media and with your friends. There are humans behind those headlines and we must act and help these victims in every way that we can. Everyone is on social media nowadays, and I don't care if you have 15 followers or a thousand followers. Your voice is still important, and it's important to be active, especially when it comes to people's lives.

(27:21) Zoya: It's also very important to donate because even small donations could create such a big change. We have provided some links. If you're listening to this podcast on Spotify or Apple Apple Podcasts, the links are under the podcast in the description if you want to go to donate towards those causes. If every person donates \$1, this could cause so much change. There was a quote that I've read about a child who said \$10 for them could buy him like even a thin mattress that he could sleep on. So even if you skipped your coffee for the day or bought a medium instead of a large that day, you could literally be a cause for a kid not to sleep on the street for that day. He could sleep on on a mattress, or even if it's a blanket, \$10 there could buy them food for two days and it could fulfill them. So just think about how much of a change this could cause if he was to donate like part of this money towards them.

Amar (28:26): Yeah. And like Zoya said, there will be a couple of donation links in the description of this podcast. Your donation will go directly to those affected. But please, like whatever you do, please do your part in supporting these victims and making sure that history doesn't repeat itself again. If enough people come together to promote a change, I assure you that we can make a difference.

Vasiliy (28:52): Thanks for sharing those available links. I know that I'm going to skip my Dutch Bros. golden eagle chai, two shot of espresso, light ice, made with half and half, no whipped cream, extra cinnamon sprinkle or chai with me, sugar free and no caramel drizzle. It's no laughing matter that my cup of coffee is \$8 and for two extra bucks we could put somebody in a warm bed at night. What kind of coffee are you guys going to get?

Zoya (29:24): I'll skip my caramel macchiato, my extra carmel macchiato.

Amar (29:29): I don't drink coffee, but I'm willing to skip it. If I did, I'm willing to skip it any day if that means that I could help save a life. Thank you for listening. We hope our ongoing conversations spark understandings, empathy and motivation to join the struggle for a better future for all. You just listen to the Building Justice podcast. The information contained in this podcast represents the views and opinions of the hosts and guests and does not necessarily represent the views or opinions of Sacramento State or c r i s j (CRISJ)

Outro Music Lyrics

No more penalties and no more wars. Based on the actions. Now, time for "Building Justice,"
"Building Justice." Time for building justice, justice.