

Item 3.1

Catastrophic Events in North Africa

File No: S051491

Minute by the Lord Mayor

To Council:

In recent days, North Africa has suffered two catastrophic events, resulting in the loss of thousands of lives. An earthquake in south-west Morocco and floods in north-east Libya have devastated villages and towns, leaving many survivors injured and displaced.

Morocco

On 8 September 2023, a magnitude 6.8 to 6.9 earthquake struck Morocco's Marrakesh–Safi region with devastating effect. Tremors were also felt in Spain, Portugal, and Algeria. Almost 3,000 people are reported to have died and over 5,530 injured, with this number expected to rise. The United Nations estimates that around 300,000 people, including 100,000 children, are affected.

The earthquake is Morocco's most catastrophic since 1960, when the coastal city of Agadir, about 240 kilometres southwest of Marrakesh was destroyed and nearly 15,000 people died - a third of the city's population at that time.

The earthquake's epicentre was located 73.4 kilometres southwest of Marrakesh, in the High Atlas Mountains, with many of the worst affected areas being remote villages and towns. Several villages were completely flattened, leaving those who survived without homes. The steep and winding roads and narrow, dusty tracks which provide the only access were clogged with rubble. One village, Tafeghaghte, around 60 kilometres from Marrakesh had its population of 200 people nearly halved.

Survivors have had to cope with a lack of running water, stable electricity, internet access and telephone service. The lack of infrastructure such railways, roads, and hospitals has hampered aid efforts made more difficult by damage to roads and tracks. Traumatized village residents have been faced with trying to rescue people trapped in rubble and relying on each other for support. Some help has come from private organisations and citizens who had made the difficult journey into the mountainous region.

While Marrakesh was spared the wholesale destruction experienced in the mountains, the earthquake caused damage in the older parts of the city. Some homes and portions of the city walls collapsed, leaving families trapped beneath debris. Several buildings in the Medina of Marrakesh, a UNESCO World Heritage Site dating from the 12th century, also collapsed.

Hastily built tent cities are housing displaced people on the roads outside of Marrakesh, while in Marrakesh many are sleeping next to their cars in parking lots or on the roadside.

Recovery from this devastation could take many years, according to the International Red Cross.

Libya

On the weekend immediately following the Moroccan earthquake, Storm Daniel, recorded as the deadliest weather event this year, battered parts of Libya's north-east coast with 400 millimetres of rain over a 24-hour period. In the preceding days, it had moved through the Mediterranean Sea, swamping Greece, Turkey and Bulgaria causing extensive flooding.

On Sunday 10 September 2023, the storm's torrential rain destroyed several bridges and caused two dams to burst near Derna, a coastal city in northeast Libya with a population of about 90,000. The resulting floods washed away around a quarter of the city, with entire neighbourhoods, including homes, schools and mosques, swept into the sea. Streets which have not become rivers are covered in mud and rubble, littered with upturned vehicles.

The floodwaters were accompanied by strong winds of up to 80 kilometres per hour, which interrupted communications and brought down electricity towers and trees.

The devastation has cut off Derna from the west and east. The only access is from the south on an unpaved road, slowing the delivery of aid and the arrival of rescue teams.

As of 13 September 2023, over 6,800 people have died from the floods, while over 10,000 people were believed missing. However, numbers are expected to be much higher. The United Nations' International Organisation for Migration has estimated that at least 30,000 people have been displaced.

Disaster relief

Relief efforts in both Morocco and Libya have been severely hampered by their respective governments. The Moroccan Government is only willing to accept aid from a handful of countries, while government in Libya is divided. An internationally recognized government based in Tripoli controls Libya's western half. However, flood-stricken Derna is in a separately administered region in the east where the main authority is the Libyan National Army based in Tobruk. Tripoli and Tobruk are working together to some extent to address the crisis.

Despite these challenges, aid organisations are working on the ground in both Morocco and Libya. The City of Sydney should support these efforts.

I therefore propose we donate \$25,000 to Oxfam Australia's Morocco Earthquake Appeal subject to confirmation from Oxfam Australia that the Moroccan government is accepting international humanitarian aid. Oxfam Australia is collaborating with Oxfam Great Britain and local partners in Morocco to assess the needs of the impacted communities and define their response to this earthquake. Council's donation will support the provision of clean water, food, emergency shelter, sanitation facilities and health advice. Once the immediate danger has passed, Oxfam will work with local communities to rebuild lives and reduce the risk of future disasters.

I also propose we donate \$25,000 to UNICEF's Children's Emergency Appeal to support its work in Libya. UNICEF is working alongside its partners to deliver critical emergency supplies to children and their families affected by destruction caused by the floods. Council's donation will contribute to life-saving supplies including emergency food ration packs, water purification tablets and education supplies.

These donations comply with the City of Sydney's Support for Charities Policy adopted by Council on 21 November 2022, are in line with previous donations and align with objective 7.3.2 (2) of the City's Operational Plan 2023/24, which states that the City will support communities beyond our local area and international communities experiencing emergency situations.

Recommendation

It is resolved that:

- (A) Council donate:
 - (i) \$25,000 to Oxfam Australia's Morocco Earthquake Appeal from the 2023/24 General Contingency Fund subject to confirmation from Oxfam Australia that the Moroccan government is accepting international humanitarian aid; and
 - (ii) \$25,000 to the Australian Committee for UNICEF Limited for their Children's Emergency Appeal for Libya from the 2023/24 General Contingency Fund; and
- (B) the Chief Executive Officer be requested to arrange a program for staff donations to the above appeals and for Council to match dollar for dollar any contributions until the end of October 2023 from the 2023/24 General Contingency Fund.

COUNCILLOR CLOVER MOORE AO

Lord Mayor