

News sent by- Harry Fouche CACCI Partner

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti - A powerful earthquake hit the impoverished country of Haiti on Tuesday, collapsing a hospital and other buildings and raising fears of "substantial" casualties.

A reporter for the Reuters news agency in Port-au-Prince, the capital, said he saw dozens of dead and injured people in the rubble, which blocked streets in the city. A local employee for the U.S. charity Food for the Poor said more houses were destroyed than were left standing along Delmas Road, a major thoroughfare in the city.

The earthquake had a magnitude of 7 and was centered about 10 miles west of the capital, Port-au-Prince, according to the U.S. Geological Survey. It was followed a short time later by powerful aftershocks of magnitudes 5.9, 5.5 and 5.1, the USGS said.

Don Blakeman, an analyst at the USGS in Golden, Colo., said such a strong quake carried the potential for widespread damage.

"I think we are going to see substantial damage and casualties," he said.

A tsunami watch was issued for neighboring Cuba, the Bahamas and the Dominican Republic, where the quake was felt in the capital, Santo Domingo, more than 300 miles away. The quake was also felt at the U.S. base in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

An Associated Press videographer saw a wrecked hospital in Petionville, a suburb near the capital, and a U.S. government official reported seeing houses that had tumbled into a ravine. U.S. officials in Haiti reported that all land telephones and cell phones were down in Port-au-Prince.

Haiti's ambassador to the United States, Raymond Joseph, said from his office in Washington that he spoke to President Rene Preval's chief of staff, Fritz Longchamp, just after the quake hit. He said Longchamp told him that "buildings were crumbling right and left" near the national palace.

In Washington, the State Department said early reports indicated that a building collapsed across the street from the U.S. Embassy but that there was no word of damage at the embassy.

A spokesperson for the State Department said the embassy was "currently accounting for staff and attempting to activate the U.S. citizen warden network."

"The State Department is standing ready to help in any way we can," the spokesperson added.

'The sky is gray with dust'

"Everybody is just totally, totally freaked out and shaken," said Henry Bahn, a visiting official with the U.S. Agriculture Department. "The sky is just gray with dust."

Bahn said he was walking to his hotel room when the ground began to shake.

“I just held on and bounced across the wall,” he said. “I just hear a tremendous amount of noise and shouting and screaming in the distance.”

Bahn said that rocks were strewn all over the place and that he saw a ravine where several homes had been built. “It’s just full of collapsed walls and rubble and barbed wire,” he said.

Radio Metropole in Port-au-Prince reported the quake lasted more than a minute, overturning vehicles in the street. Communications were severely disrupted on the island.

In the suburb of Petionville, a building of at least three floors collapsed. The building housed at least two private offices, and a tractor was on the scene trying to clear debris and recover any survivors, according to Radio Metropole.

Luke Renner, an American humanitarian worker based in the city of Cap-Haitien on the north coast of the island, told NBC News he felt the “whole world shaking.” He said he thought trees were going to fall down but there did not appear to be any major structural damage in that city.