

Death toll from devastating Equatorial Guinea blasts jumps to 98



Health ministry says 615 also wounded in huge explosions that destroyed buildings at military barracks and countless homes in Bata.

Bata, March 9 (RHC)-- The death toll from a series of explosions at a military base in Equatorial Guinea's main city of Bata has jumped to 98, according to officials. Some 615 people were wounded in Sunday's blasts, which started with a fire at the Nkoantoma Military Base in the coastal city of Bata.

President Teodoro Obiang Nguema attributed the disaster to "negligence" related to the handling of dynamite and said the explosions damaged almost all homes and buildings in Bata.

Equatorial Guinea's health ministry said on Twitter it had prepared a mental health brigade made up of psychiatrists, psychologists and nurses to attend to the victims of the blast. "The damages are not only physical but also mental," said the ministry, which later on Monday gave the updated death toll, up from 31.

Images published by local media showed bodies wrapped in sheets and lined up on the side of a road, with children being pulled out from under piles of broken concrete and twisted metal.

Dramatic television footage from the base showed buildings torn apart, with survivors picking through the debris for their belongings. In a tragic moment, a military search team is seen carrying away the body of a child from a blast-damaged building under the grief-stricken gaze of the child's father.

Television station TVGE showed Vice President Teodoro Nguema Obiang Mangue, the son of the president, visiting a hospital where victims were being treated on Monday.

The blasts come as Equatorial Guinea, an oil producer, is suffering a double economic shock because of the coronavirus pandemic and a drop in the price of crude oil, which provides about three-quarters of state revenue.

The majority of the 1.4 million population lives in poverty. The government has called for international support to help in the search and rescue effort and also in efforts to rebuild. "Following the devastating explosions in Bata yesterday ... Spain will proceed with the immediate dispatch of a shipment of humanitarian aid," Spanish Foreign Minister Arancha Gonzalez Laya said on Twitter.

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