

# *Dozens killed as earthquake hits western Afghanistan*

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**Dozens killed, more than 700 homes damaged in the western Badghis province after 5.3-magnitude earthquake.**

Kabul, January 17 (RHC)-- At least 26 people have been killed after an earthquake hit western Afghanistan, an official said. The victims died when roofs of their houses collapsed on Monday in Qadis district in the western province of Badghis, spokesman for the province Baz Mohammad Sarwary told news agencies.

“Five women and four children are among the 26 people killed in the earthquake,” said Sarwary, adding that four more people were injured. He said the first rescuers have arrived at some of the affected areas under heavy rain, but warned that the number of casualties could increase as Badghis, bordering Turkmenistan, is a mountainous province and one of Afghanistan’s most impoverished and underdeveloped regions.

A second quake, at magnitude 4.9, struck the area two hours after the first. Mullah Janan Saeqe, head of the Emergency Operations Centre of the Ministry of State for Emergency Affairs, confirmed the death toll and said more than 700 houses had been damaged.

The earthquake also inflicted damage on the residents of Muqr district in the province but details, including casualties, were still unavailable, he said. Sarwary said the tremors were felt across the province. Some homes in Qala-e-Naw, the provincial capital, suffered cracks but no major injuries or widespread damage, he added.

Afghanistan is in the grip of a humanitarian disaster, worsened by the Taliban takeover of the country in August, when Western countries froze international aid and access to assets held abroad.

Qadis is one of the areas worst affected by a devastating drought, benefitting little from international aid in the past 20 years. The country is frequently hit by earthquakes, especially in the Hindu Kush mountain range, which lies near the junction of the Eurasian and Indian tectonic plates.

Earthquakes can cause significant damage to poorly built homes and buildings in Afghanistan. In 2015, nearly 280 people were killed when a powerful 7.5-magnitude earthquake centred in the mountain range ripped across South Asia, with the bulk of the deaths in Pakistan. In that disaster, 12 young Afghan girls were crushed to death in a stampede as they tried to flee their shaking school building.

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