

Scientist says volcanic eruption in Congo imminent

May 7 2009, By EDDY ISANGO , Associated Press Writer



FILE- In this Wednesday, Nov. 12, 2008 file photo, displaced people line up to receive non-food items from the Red Cross, with Nyiragongo volcano smoking in the background, in Kibati, just north of Goma, in eastern Congo. A major volcano in the central African nation could be about to erupt and threaten a town with a population of more than half a million people, scientists said Thursday, May 7, 2009.(AP Photo/Karel Prinsloo, File)

(AP) -- Scientists found evidence of intense volcanic activity - including tremors, pools of lava and plumes of smoke - at two volcanoes near a major city in eastern Congo, and said some residents had fled for fear of an eruption.

The volcanoes in the central African nation could be about to erupt, threatening Goma, which has a population of more than half a million people, scientists said Thursday. They made their observations on visits to the two volcanic peaks of Nyiragongo and Nyamulagira.

"The eruption could be tomorrow, or the day after - or at any other time," said Dieudonne Wafula, the head of Goma's Volcanological Observatory.

The Nyiragongo crater is only 11 miles (18 kilometers) north of Lake Kivu, where Goma is located. Wafula estimates that 1.3 million people are threatened by the two volcanoes, including the residents of Goma, the villages surrounding it and the inhabitants of Gisenyi, located across the Rwandan border.

"The villagers living near Nyiragongo have already left their villages after they saw the [volcano](#) shake today. They thought it was already erupting," Wafula said.

He said government agencies and Red Cross workers were making preparations, although the country's infrastructure has been destroyed by decades of civil war.

Nyiragongo is listed as one of the eight most dangerous volcanoes in the world and its lava can flow at up to 24 miles (40 kilometers) per hour, according to Wafula.

The crater last erupted in 2002, destroying about a fifth of the residential areas of Goma, the provincial capital of Congo's North Kivu province. About 100 people died as lava flows as deep as 10 feet (3 meters) overtook parts of the city.

Nyamulagira erupted later the same year, shooting plumes of [lava](#) 300 feet (91 meters) into the air, but without threatening Goma.

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