

Quakes were biggest disaster killers of decade: UN

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Chinese policemen survey the devastated town of Beichuan in May 2009, a year after the Sichuan earthquake that left over 87,000 people dead. Earthquakes triggered the deadliest disasters of the past decade and remain a major threat for millions of people worldwide who live in some of the world's megacities, the United Nations said.

Earthquakes triggered the deadliest disasters of the past decade and remain a major threat for millions of people worldwide who live in some of the world's megacities, the United Nations said Thursday.

A UN-backed study said nearly 60 percent of about 780,000 people killed by [disasters](#) in 2000 to 2009 died during earthquakes.

But climate events affected far more people -- nearly three quarters of the two billion hit by catastrophes.

Storms accounted for 22 percent of the overall death toll while [extreme temperatures](#) claimed 11 percent of lives lost in 3,852 disasters over the period.

Officials and researchers also maintained their alarm over climate or weather-related disasters as the overall number of catastrophes more than doubled compared to the previous decade.

The global bill for disasters reached 960 billion dollars according to the study by the Center for Research on Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED) at Belgium's Catholic University of Louvain.

"Earthquakes are the deadliest natural hazard of the past 10 years and remain a serious threat for millions of people worldwide as eight out of the 10 most populous cities in the world are on earthquake fault-lines," said Margareta Wahlstroem, UN Special Representative for Disaster Risk Reduction.

But just four percent of those hit by catastrophes over the decade suffered in earthquakes, while 44 percent of them were affected by floods and 30 percent by droughts, the study found.

The deadliest disasters in the first decade of the 21st century were the [Indian Ocean Tsunami](#) in 2004, which killed 226,408 people in several countries, Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar, which claimed 136,366 lives in 2008 and the Sichuan earthquake in China that year, with 87,476 deaths.

Some 73,338 people were also killed in an earthquake in Pakistan (2005) and 72,210 in heat waves in Europe (2003).

The current decade has got off to an equally deadly start, with about 170,000 feared dead in the powerful and unprecedented [earthquake](#) that struck Haiti's capital Port-au-Prince and the surrounding area on January

12.

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