

Strong quake rattles Colombian capital

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People mill about on the streets after an earthquake in Bogota, on August 17, 2023.

A strong earthquake followed by dozens of aftershocks rattled central Colombia and the capital Bogota on Thursday, setting off sirens and sparking panic, authorities said.

No major damage was reported, but one woman died after jumping from a building, and Bogota's mayor noted "reports of people trapped in elevators and other minor events."

The Colombian Geological Survey put the quake's magnitude at 6.1, while the US Geological Survey (USGS) reported it at 6.3.

The Colombian agency said the earthquake struck at 12:04 pm (1704 GMT), with its epicenter in the town of El Calvario, 40 kilometers (25 miles) southeast of Bogota. It hit at a depth of less than 30 kilometers.

Buildings shook and sirens sounded as thousands of panicked residents poured into the streets of the capital, gripping their cell phones as they called loved ones, AFP journalists observed.

"The only serious incident reported was a woman who threw herself from the 10th floor of a residential building... apparently due to a nervous disorder," said the mayor of the capital, Claudia Lopez, on the X social network, formerly known as Twitter.

Firefighters confirmed the woman's death.

Social media users reported feeling the quake in the cities of Villavicencio, Bucaramanga, Tunja and Ibaguè, all near the epicenter.

"Strong tremor in Bogota. Let's remain calm and cautious. Please take all precautions against possible aftershocks. Calm, serenity and caution," Lopez warned on X.



Central Colombia is very seismically active and features one of the country's main geological faults.

Seismically active

US diplomat Francisco Palmieri was giving a speech at a Bogota hotel when the quake hit, as seen in a video of the session, which was attended by President Gustavo Petro.

Palmieri stopped talking to ask in English if there had been an earthquake, then resumed speaking, with a smile. The hotel was not evacuated.

A piece of the ceiling in the congress building detached but caused no injuries, according to videos released by the lower chamber on X.

A landslide was reported in Villavicencio, while only the windows of homes and businesses were reportedly affected in El Calvario, according to an update from the National Unit for Disaster Risk Management.

The main road linking Bogota to the country's southeast was temporarily shut due to landslides, local officials said.

At least 35 aftershocks struck later Thursday, with the USGS reporting one that registered a 5.7 magnitude.

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In 2008, a quake centered in El Calvario left 11 people dead.

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