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Four devastating earthquakes, thousands buried by rubble in Haiti

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The capital of Haiti, Port-Au-Prince, home to two million people, was devastated yesterday afternoon (shortly before midnight in Italy) by four tremendous earthquakes, the first of which was the strongest (7.0-7.3 on the Richter scale); in an instant, the city became a stretch of ruins, covered by an enormous grey cloud of dust, with thousands of people swallowed up by the rubble.

As night-time fell, while rescuers began to respond, the city became engulfed in complete darkness, the streets were inhabited by ghostly figures, not knowing where to go.

The focus of the four earthquakes was at a depth of just 10 kilometres. The epicentres were all close to one another, all on dry land, and near the capital: the first was 15 km south-west, the second and third, 25 km west-south-west, and the fourth, 30 km south west. Hospitals, the presidential palace, several ministries, so-called luxurious hotels, buildings for businessmen and department stores all came down like papier-mâché. Even the headquarters of the UN military and civilian mission, where as many as 9000 people (7000 soldiers and 2000 police officers) are stationed, was almost razed to the ground.

There was also some concern in Tradate for the missionary Don Giuseppe Noli, and for the former parish priest Don Mauro Brescianini, who are in Haiti to follow a number of projects supporting the population. However, the two men live in areas far from the epicentre that were not hit by the earthquake. Fortunately, relatives managed yesterday to get in touch with them, and at least they are safe and sound, in this appalling tragedy, which has claimed the life even of the capital's archbishop, who was buried when the cathedral collapsed. According to the more alarming rumours, which are probably exaggerated, although this in no way diminishes the extreme seriousness of the catastrophe, the final death toll could be as many as one hundred thousand.

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