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8.8-Magnitude Earthquake Strikes Chile

By **ALEXEI BARRIONUEVO**

RIO DE JANEIRO — A massive 8.8-magnitude [earthquake](#) struck [Chile](#) early Saturday, shaking the capital of Santiago for 90 seconds and sending tsunami warnings from Chile to Ecuador.

Chile's TVN cable news channel was reporting 78 deaths, with the toll expected to rise.

The quake downed buildings and houses in Santiago and knocked out a major bridge connecting the northern and southern sections of the country.

It struck at 3:34 a.m. local time and was centered about 200 miles southwest of Santiago, at a depth of 22 miles, the U.S. Geological Survey reported. The epicenter was some 70 miles from Concepcion, Chile's second-largest city, where more than 200,000 people live.

Phone lines were down in Concepcion as of 7:30 a.m. and no reports were coming out of that area. The quake in Chile was 1,000 times more powerful than the magnitude 7.0 earthquake that caused widespread damage in Haiti on Jan 12, killing at least 230,000, earthquake experts reported on CNN International.

The U.S. Geological Survey and eyewitnesses reported more than a dozen aftershocks, including two measuring magnitude 6.2 and 6.9.

"We have had a huge earthquake," said [Michelle Bachelet](#), Chile's president, speaking from an emergency response center in an appeal for Chileans to remain calm. "We're doing everything we can with all the resources we have."

Mrs. Bachelet said that the government had dispatched three emergency response teams to coastal areas. She confirmed an initial death total of six people, five of them in the Maule region and one in the Araucanía region.

"Without a doubt, with a quake of this kind, of this size, of this magnitude, we can't rule out that there are other deaths and probably injuries," Mrs. Bachelet told reporters.

Eyewitnesses on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) reported that the quake was felt from Japan to Argentina.

The quake struck at the end of the Chilean summer vacation, with hundreds of thousands of people expected to be traveling back home this weekend.

The Pacific Tsunami Warning Center issued a warning for Chile and Peru, and a less-urgent tsunami watch for Ecuador, Colombia, Panama, Costa Rica and Antarctica. It said a tsunami could also hit Hawaii later in the day, the Associated Press reported.

Lying along the mountainous Andean coast, Chile is accustomed to earthquakes. The largest earthquake ever recorded struck the same area as Saturday's quake on May 22, 1960. That quake, which registered a magnitude 9.5, killed 1,655 people and left 2 million homeless. The tsunami that it caused killed people in Hawaii, Japan and the Philippines and caused damage to the West Coast of the United States.

Charles Newbery contributed reporting from Buenos Aires, Argentina