

“It is vital the donor community looks past the politics of the past in Libya and sees this tragedy for what is - one of human suffering. People need support, and they need it quickly.”

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In the aftermath of two humanitarian disasters in Libya and Morocco, one of the country's top humanitarian experts has warned “the world can't afford to look away”. Shameet Thakkar, founder and managing director of Unimed Procurement Services, who works with charitable organisations and NGOs to provide lifesaving medical commodities to countries in need worldwide, said:

“The last few days have been absolutely horrendous, and it is heartbreaking to watch such scenes of devastation unfold.

“The pace at which events are moving in Libya in the last 24 hours is almost unimaginable.

“More than 5,000 people are feared to have died, but that number could double according to experts working on the ground.

“Eyewitnesses describe the scenes there as being like ‘Doomsday’, with water taking the ground from underneath victims’ feet.

“In humanitarian and recovery terms, dealing with a crisis of this nature would be difficult in any region.

“But in Libya it is particularly challenging.

“One of the biggest issues is that Libya is divided between two rival governments, with one operating from Tripoli and another one in the east.

“This immediately creates the risk of confusion due to not having one centralised approach from which to deliver a strategy.

“The other, more pressing matter, is the fact that Libya hasn’t had much donation or donor support in recent years due to previous sanctions.

“The pot is empty at a time when the healthcare system is already in a very, very poor state.

“Now, the events of the last 24 hours will put intolerable pressure on an already creaking system.

“It is vital the donor community looks past the politics of the past in Libya and sees this tragedy for what is - one of human suffering. People need support, and they need it quickly.

“The people of Morocco need support too.

“The earthquake in Morocco has been simply devastating. Seeing the events unfold has been truly shocking, and the level of suffering many people on the ground are enduring is impossible to imagine.

“Sadly, it is likely that the already substantial death toll is only set to increase. This disaster has delivered a significant blow to its population – and it’s one that will be difficult to mend.

“Up until now, the emergency response provided by humanitarian organisations and governments deserves huge praise. But we need to think about long-term support for Morocco’s population – and the same should be done for Libya.

“Those in charge of the rescue effort can’t simply focus on a short-term response. The aim should be

to support the ongoing struggles that will more clearly emerge in the days, weeks and months after the immediate response.

“It’s important to note that Morocco’s healthcare system, like Libya’s, was not without its issues before the crisis, with the country struggling to provide high-quality healthcare to some of its population. The earthquake will therefore place an even greater burden on hospitals, and the lack of resources could cause a disaster within a disaster. The most significant issue now isn’t just the risk of a second quake: poorly coordinated services pose a huge risk, too.

“A lot of organisations have responded quickly to source and supply essential resources, and this has been vital. Right now, having access to clean water, medical supplies, food and shelter is essential and it is certainly making a substantial contribution in relieving some of the suffering. Libya needs the same help.

“But as time passes more and more people are becoming in need of aid and support.

“My biggest concern is that many charitable organisations won’t be able to provide the long-term support Morocco needs. Hospitals will be impaired for a very long period of time, and so more thought needs to be given to resource distribution, and the extra demand stemming from the crisis.

“In a few months, when their help will no longer be available, Morocco will still need support to rebuild its healthcare infrastructure and care for its population.

“In times of crisis, countries must come together to support those affected by natural disasters, and we’ve already seen some positive examples of emergency resources being offered on short notice from countries such as Tunisia, Qatar, Algeria and Spain. The hope is that these will continue.

“Morocco’s population will need continued supplies and assistance, so it is vital that governments and charities focus on long-term preparedness.

“We must work towards increasing overall healthcare resilience and building resources for purposes other than emergency response, so that in the case of other natural disasters occurring or healthcare crises arising, countries can be better equipped to tackle them.

“The events we’ve seen unfold in Morocco and Libya have been harrowing. But they are real, and they are ongoing. The world simply can’t afford to look away.”

Shameet Thakkar is one of the country’s leading humanitarian experts. He is the founder and managing director of procurement organisation Unimed Procurement Services, winner of the Queen's Award for Enterprise for International Trade 2022, regularly partnering with charities and NGOs to help deliver lifesaving medical commodities.