

Tzfat Mayor: Tens of thousands of residents are under threat of an earthquake

Tzfat Mayor warns: A powerful earthquake will happen. Without government assistance, thousands will be killed.

Shuki Ohana, Mayor of the northern Israeli city of Tzfat (Safed), on Wednesday warned of an earthquake disaster in which thousands of residents of the city will be killed.

Ohana's comments came in an interview with Israel National News, after two earthquakes were felt in northern Israel in a span of several hours.

"We have been feeling this for a long time and the last two quakes have given us another warning that if the actions that need to be done by the Israeli government are not taken, we are likely to be at high risk," said Ohana, adding, "Now is the time to set up an administration to strengthen buildings, especially in a city like Tzfat, which is on the Syrian-African rift, and which experienced an earthquake in 1837 that completely destroyed the city and in 1927 suffered another strong earthquake."

Ohana talks said a number of mayors of cities that are at high risk of an earthquake have come together in demanding the establishment of an administration to strengthen buildings that will help prepare accordingly. He said that so far the municipality has received assistance for the strengthening of seven buildings and three more are expected, but the real numbers of buildings that require strengthening are infinitely higher.

"Dear government and dear ministers, investing in strengthening buildings in the center of the country is economic, but we also need to do it here. Today there are nine cities at risk [in the north] and the tenth is Eilat, and all must be treated immediately," he stated.

"The recent earthquakes once again remind us of the great danger we face. Everyone is talking about the home front and the third Lebanon war, but the

biggest challenge is here in the north. An earthquake will leave more destruction and devastation here than any war. A powerful earthquake is not a question of if, but of when," warned Ohana.

"If the state does not immediately address the issue, entire neighborhoods will collapse and leave destruction and ruin and it will, of course, cost human lives as well. I am sure that everyone understands the risk in the Galilee region because of the nature of the region and because of the large number of old buildings," said Ohana, who noted a recent survey which found that 82 percent of the buildings in Tzfat are at risk of destruction. "The equation must be changed."

He noted that Tzfat has 40,000 residents and the city is on its way to reach 70,000 residents. Many of these residents live in old buildings from the 1950s and 1960s. An earthquake that would hit such a large number of residents would be dramatically devastating and cost in human life.

"A systemic treatment is needed. If not, the lawyers should already prepare for the next commission of inquiry," warned the Mayor.

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