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Civil Defense not doing enough, complain families of the missing

Arab News

JEDDAH: Citizens living in Um Al-Khair, a Jeddah area affected by the severe floods, have accused the Civil Defense of negligence and a lack of responsibility toward those missing. Families of the victims say that they recovered 19 bodies all by themselves. They alleged the Civil Defense had not responded to calls for at least five days.



SHOCKING: Volunteers dig out a car with a body inside it in the Kilo 14 area of Jeddah. (AN photo by Abdullah Al-Muwallad)

Residents said that the area is full of wild dogs feeding on the missing bodies. They also demanded action against those who approved their area for residential use despite the fact it was a valley for floodwater.

Thabit Al-Sulami, a resident who lost his brother in the tragedy, said that the role of the Civil Defense seems to be only in transporting the bodies recovered by the citizens. He said that it was down to their efforts that tractors were provided to clear the roads so they could reach disaster areas. He said that there was only one tractor in an area of five kilometers.

Volunteer Abdullah Al-Murtairi said he helped recover 15 bodies. He accused the Civil Defense of not helping properly and not answering emergency calls.

He said that when they finally responded, only a small team accompanied by a tractor arrived. They did not seem to understand the pain and suffering the victims' families were feeling. "I cannot understand why this area was approved for residential area seven years ago," he said.

Over 1,000 people are reported missing in seven different neighborhoods east of the Jeddah-Makkah expressway, claimed Al-Murtairi.

Another angry resident sarcastically said the disaster showed how well prepared the Civil Defense was. He said that it was a shame that this was their level of performance in such a disaster, even though other countries have suffered worse.

Meanwhile, the flood-hit families have also complained about the lack of information regarding repairs to their homes and cars. They added there is contradiction when it comes to the procedures they must follow in such situations, Madinah daily reported.

Ahmad Al-Juhani said that his house was badly damaged. "The sewage water filled the house. All furniture is gone. There are no windows or doors, not to mention the mud that entered the house. We do not know what to do. Should we start cleaning the house or wait for the special committee that is formed to evaluate the damage?"

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He added a Civil Defense official arrived at his house to inspect the damage, claiming he did not bother to get out of his car. Al-Juhani added the official simply told him to specify what was damaged in the property and to start cleaning up. When he went to the financial ministry representative, he was instructed not to touch anything until a special committee evaluates the damage.

Salem Al-Bekairi said until now no one has told them the truth about the fate of their homes and cars. He said the Civil Defense looked at the damage while no financial ministry representative was to be seen.

"I want the financial minister to come public in a televised press conference to tell us about the fate of our properties. We need to see people on the ground that gives us clear answers and relieve us from some of the pain we are suffering from. We are lost."

Another resident, Homoud Al-Hakami, said that they were suffering from the arrogance and bad treatment by Civil Defense officials, adding they refuse to give any information.

"We are already in pain and suffering and these people are making it even worse. They are even humiliating us with their complicated procedures."

Waleed Al-Salmi said that it is evident that both the financial ministry and Civil Defense are not coordinating with each other. He tried to enquire about his car, only to be told by Civil Defense officials that they had been brought in from other cities to help in the rescue operation.

"They do not have any information and they do not know the names of the neighborhoods. They do not know where the damaged cars are and I bet they do not know where they are standing in."



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