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King Abdullah orders probe, compensation

Muhammad Humaidan | Arab News

JEDDAH: Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah ordered an immediate payment of SR1 million to the family of each person who died in last week's flood in Jeddah. The king also ordered the setting up of a high-level committee that will be headed by Makkah Gov. Prince Khaled Al-Faisal and will consist of representatives of various ministries. The committee will study the extent of the damage due to the calamity. It will also study the causes of the crisis and recommend ways to ensure that it does not happen again.

"It is painful that many countries, some with even less potential than the Kingdom, experience similar rainfall almost every day, but there are no devastation of the magnitude we witnessed in Jeddah and that saddens us," said the king.

He also said that those responsible for this tragedy would be taken to task.

"We cannot ignore the fact that there were mistakes and failures on the part of some departments and it is our duty to identify those responsible and take action against them."

Earlier, Prince Khaled Al-Faisal speaking at a press conference, attributed the catastrophe in Jeddah to the delay in implementing drainage projects in the city. He also cited the ongoing construction on valley passes in most of the affected districts as being the reason for the tragedy.

He assured the people of Jeddah that all measures had been taken to deal with any emergency situation.

"We are facing problems for which we should find immediate solutions. We have committees currently assessing the damage, pointing out the causes of the disaster and suggesting remedies," he said. He said money was already being paid to people who have been provided accommodation.

"The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques and the second deputy premier are very concerned about the condition of Jeddah after the rains and floods," he added.

Prince Mishaal, director of Civil Defense Maj. Gen. Saad Al-Tuwaijri, Mayor of Jeddah Adel Fakieh, director of Jeddah police Maj. Gen. Ali Al-Saadi Al-Ghamdi and director of roads and bridges in Makkah region Mufrih Al-Zahrani also attended the conference at Prince Khaled's Jeddah home.

"The catastrophe was big. Of course crises happen everywhere else in the world. We should consider what happened in Jeddah with rationality and impartiality, not with emotions. We convey our condolences to the families who lost their members in this tragedy and assure them that the lost ones are also our sons and daughters," said Prince Khaled. He added rescue and recovery work was still continuing and would finish in days.

Section Navigation

- Kingdom
- » [Local Press](#)
- » [Law & You](#)
- » [Art & Culture](#)
- » [Weather](#)
- » [Community News](#)
- » [Review](#)
- » [Side Lights](#)
- Home

Prince Ahmed Bin Salman



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Al-Tuw aijri said the Civil Defense has all the necessary tools and qualified staff to deal with any type of emergency. He said Civil Defense personnel had been involved in similar situations outside Saudi Arabia in the past. He added the Civil Defense dealt with the disaster as was required and would deal with new developments as necessary.

When Arab News questioned him why no evacuation plans had been drawn up despite the Baladiyyah being warned last month that the lack of drains and expected heavy rains could result in disaster, Fakieh conceded lessons had to be learned. He however added that evacuation plans were the responsibility of the Civil Defense. There was also the issue of where to evacuate people, he said, adding it would have been disastrous if they had been moved to the path of floods. In any case, the primary concern had been the sewage lake in a hill east of the city, he claimed.

Prince Mishaal said the catastrophe has sounded a warning bell as to what might happen in the future. "We should never allow what happened to repeat itself in the future," he said.

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