

《新西兰为地震逝者举行默哀仪式》

New Zealand has held a two-minute silence exactly a week after the devastating Christchurch earthquake.

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Engineers say at least a third of the buildings in the centre of Christchurch will need to be demolished

At 1251 local time (2351 GMT) on Tuesday afternoon, the whole country fell silent to mark the moment the deadly quake struck seven days ago.

Rescuers downed their tools for two minutes before resuming their work.

The death toll currently stands at 154, but officials say it could rise as high as 240 as dozens of people are missing; frequent aftershocks have not helped.

The cost of the 6.3-magnitude quake is expected to reach NZ\$20bn (\$15bn; £9.3bn).

Although of lower magnitude than last September's quake, which killed no-one, this quake struck at shallow depth, when the South Island city was at its busiest.

Nobody has been found alive since Wednesday.

Shared pain

Flags flew at half mast and traffic stopped. Church bells tolled across the country.

In Christchurch, the noise of jackhammers????? and diggers working to clear the rubble fell silent.

The only sound for two minutes was that of weeping, as Prime Minister John Key led a memorial outside the ruins of a church near the city's cathedral????? , where more than 20 people are believed to still be buried.

There a pile of rubble, collected from several of the worst-hit sites, was covered in ferns?????? , the country's natural emblem?????? .

"We gather to reflect on the precious gift of life," said the Anglican Bishop of Christchurch, Victoria Matthews.

"It's very sad, this is an earthquake that's claimed the lives of literally hundreds of people and that's hard to put into words," Mr Key told AFP after the two minutes' silence.

"This is a very dark moment for us but it's a moment that we will rebuild from," he said.

Further north, in Wellington, silent crowds spilled onto streets. People wept openly in front of parliament.

In Auckland, hundreds gathered at the cathedral, in a moment mirrored in communities across the country.

