

Blaze guts Paris' Notre-Dame Cathedral, but structure saved from destruction



Paris, April 15 (RHC)—A massive fire consumed Notre-Dame Cathedral on Monday, gutting and destroying the roof of the Paris landmark and stunning the world.

Flames that began in the early evening burst rapidly through the roof of the centuries-old cathedral and engulfed the spire, which toppled, quickly followed by the entire roof.

As it burned into the evening, firefighters battled to prevent one of the main bell towers from collapsing. One firefighter was seriously injured - the only reported casualty.

“We now believe that the two towers of Notre-Dame have been saved,” Paris fire chief Jean-Claude Gallet told reporters at the scene. “We now consider that the main structure of Notre-Dame has been saved and preserved.”

There was still a risk that some of the interior structures could collapse, and firefighters would work overnight to cool them down, he said.

Distraught Parisians and stunned tourists gazed in disbelief as the inferno raged at the cathedral, which sits on the Ile de la Cite, an island in the River Seine and marks the very center of Paris.

World leaders expressed shock and sent condolences to the French people. President Emmanuel Macron said the whole nation was distressed. “Like all our compatriots, I am sad this evening to see this part of all of us burn,” he tweeted.

A centuries-old crown of thorns made from reeds and gold and the tunic worn by Saint Louis, a 13th century king of France, were saved, Notre-Dame’s top administrative cleric, Monsignor Patrick Chauvet said. But firefighters had struggled to take down some of the large paintings in time, he said.

The Paris prosecutor’s office said it had launched an inquiry into the fire. Several police sources said that they were working on the assumption for now that it was accidental.

The fire, after burning for about 8 hours, was largely extinguished by 0300 CET on Tuesday. Earlier, in addition to battling to prevent one of the main bell towers from collapsing, firefighters tried to rescue religious relics and priceless artwork.

“The worst has been avoided,” French President Emmanuel Macron told reporters at the scene shortly before midnight.

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