

Fire out, organ intact but work ahead for charred Notre Dame: What has happened so far

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The cathedral had survived almost 900 years of tumultuous French history but was decimated amid renovation works at the start of Catholic Easter week.

Flames and smoke rise as the spire of Notre Dame cathedral is on fire in Paris, Monday, April 15, 2019. A catastrophic fire engulfed the upper reaches of Paris's soaring Notre Dame Cathedral as it was undergoing renovations Monday, threatening one of the greatest architectural treasures of the Western world as tourists and Parisians looked on aghast from the streets below. (AP Photo/Dominique Bichon)

Paris: After an over 12-hour battle to douse an inferno engulfing Paris's iconic Notre Dame cathedral, firefighters Tuesday declared success. The blaze entirely claimed its spire and roof but spared its bell towers.

Paris firefighters's spokesperson Gabriel Plus told the Associated Press that "the entire fire is out".

What was left after the blaze was a soot black shell of the monument immortalised in Victor Hugo's 1831 novel "The Hunchback of Notre Dame". The cathedral had survived almost 900 years of tumultuous French history but was decimated amid renovation works at the start of Catholic Easter week.

The cathedral's iconic twin bell towers, however, remained intact.

In an interview with AP, Junior Interior Minister Laurent Nunez said, "The task is " now the risk of fire has been put aside " about the building, how the structure will resist."

One of the city's five senior vicars, Philippe Marsset, told AP: "If God intervened (in the blaze) it was in the courage of the firefighters."

"Notre Dame was destroyed but the soul of France was not," Michel Aupetit, archbishop of Paris was quoted as saying by AP.

What happened at Notre Dame?

A firefighter tackles the blaze as flames and smoke rise from Notre Dame cathedral as it burns in Paris, Monday, April 15, 2019. (AP Photo/Michel Euler)

A massive blaze broke out at Notre-Dame cathedral in Paris on Monday that quickly consume its spire and roof. Scores of tourists and Parisians had watched in horror from nearby streets as flames engulfed the building and officials tried to save as much as they could of the cathedral's countless treasures, built up over centuries.

The blaze devastated two-thirds of the roof of the 850-year-old UNESCO world heritage landmark, whose spectacular Gothic spire collapsed as orange flames and clouds of grey smoke billowed into the evening sky even as the disaster

that sent shockwaves through France and the world.

What was the source of fire?

Sparks fill the air as Paris Fire brigade members spray water to extinguish flames as the Notre Dame Cathedral burns in Paris, France, April 15, 2019. REUTERS/Philippe Wojazer

Experts and investigators believe that the fire occurred during renovation work to overhaul the spire that had suffered damages inflicted by weather and pollution. Investigators are treating the case as an "involuntary fire", not arson.

Firefighters blamed the renovation work for the fire. In the incident, one firefighter sustained injuries while dousing the blaze which at one point threatened to bring down one of the two monumental towers on the western facade of the cathedral that is visited by more than 12 million tourists each year.

As a saving grace, Paris' fire brigade chief Jean-Claude Gallet had declared that "we can consider that the main structure of Notre-Dame has been saved and preserved," as well as the two bell towers. However, Culture Minister Riester sent out a warning that the structure remained unstable.

The Holy Crown of Thorns and a sacred tunic worn by 13th-century French king Louis, two irreplaceable artifacts, had been rescued along with the church's main crucifix, and placed with others at the Paris town hall.

Firefighters who entered the burning cathedral saved many of its treasures, although some paintings remained inside and risked smoke and water damage.

What did global leaders have to say about the incident?

Flames and smoke rise from Notre Dame cathedral as it burns in Paris, Monday, April 15, 2019. Massive plumes of yellow brown smoke is filling the air above Notre Dame Cathedral and ash is falling on tourists and others around the island that marks the center of Paris. (AP Photo/Thibault Camus)

Monday's fire sparked an outpouring of grief for the Parisian landmark. US President Donald Trump called the cathedral "one of the great treasures of the world." Pope Francis, Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, Lithuanian President Dalia Grybauskaitė, Denmark's Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen and Norway's Erna Solberg all expressed their sadness.

Lebanon's Prime Minister Saad Hariri expressed sadness over the fire he described as a "heritage and humanitarian disaster." The Obamas were among people sharing memories of past visits to the cathedral. Former President Barack Obama posted an old photo of himself, his wife Michelle and their two daughters lighting candles there and expressed his grief. Michelle Obama tweeted, "The majesty of Notre Dame is the history, artistry, and

spirituality “ took our breath away, lifting us to a higher understanding of who we are and who we can be.”

French president Emmanuel Macron said he would seek help from the “greatest talents” in the world to rebuild Notre Dame, and many governments said they were considering contributions to what would be a significant architectural undertaking.

Russian President Putin said in a message published on the Kremlin’s website that the tragedy “struck a chord in the hearts of Russians.” He called Notre Dame a “priceless treasure of Christian and world culture” and said Russia is ready to send the “best specialists” to help rebuild it.

Bernard Arnault pledges 200 million euros for reconstruction

A firefighter uses a hose as Notre Dame cathedral burns in Paris, Monday, April 15, 2019. A catastrophic fire engulfed the upper reaches of Paris’s soaring Notre Dame Cathedral as it was undergoing renovations Monday, threatening one of the greatest architectural treasures of the Western world as tourists and Parisians looked on aghast from the streets below. (AP Photo/Francois Mori)

French tycoon Bernard Arnault and his luxury goods group LVMH have pledged 200 million euros (\$226 million) for the reconstruction of Notre Dame, following a reported 100 million-euro donation from another French billionaire, Francois Pinault.

A statement Tuesday from LVMH said the luxury goods group and the Arnault family would make the donation to a rebuilding fund for the cathedral, which was consumed by flames Monday evening.

LVMH called the cathedral a “symbol of France, its heritage and its unity.”

Europe “wounded” by Notre-Dame fire, EU pledges help

Smoke billows as fire engulfs the spire of Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, France April 15, 2019. REUTERS/Benoit Tessier

The European Parliament in Strasbourg declared that the damage to Paris’s Notre Dame cathedral is blow to all Europe and all Europe will contribute to its rebuilding.

Promising “solidarity”, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker told lawmakers: “Europe has been wounded. France has been wounded. Paris has been wounded.”

“We are all a little bereaved,” said Juncker. “Yesterday was a terrible day for all those who love France and who love Paris.”

Vatican expresses shock and sadness

Pope Francis expressed shock and sadness at the incident and said he is offering prayers "for all those who are trying to cope with this dramatic situation", adding that the cathedral is "a symbol of Christianity in France and in the world."

Brief history of Notre Dame

The cathedral plays a central role in French society and has figured as a central character through the ups and downs of French history since construction began in mid-12th century. During the French Revolution in the 18th century, it was vandalised and plundered but would go on to feature as a central character in a Victor Hugo novel published in 1831, "The Hunchback of Notre-Dame" which is credited with helping save it.

It survived the devastation of two global conflicts in the 20th century and famously rang its bells on August 24, 1944, the day of the Liberation of Paris from German occupation at the end of the World War II.

The 12th-century church is home to relics, stained glass and other works of art of incalculable value, and is a leading tourist attraction. Its organ dates to the 1730s and was constructed by Francois Thierry.

- (With inputs from AP)