

WORLD & NATION

Relief agencies send aid to earthquake survivors

WASHINGTON (CNS) — A week after a 6.0 magnitude earthquake flattened cities in western Colombia, relief agencies scrambled to meet people's needs, while thousands fled one of the hardest-hit cities.

In the days immediately following the Jan. 25 quake, the president of the Colombian bishops' conference and Pope John Paul II called for solidarity with victims of the disaster that struck cities in the country's western coffee-growing region.

In the United States, the Catholic Medical Mission Board and Catholic Relief Services sent supplies and personnel to help.

"In this year devoted to God the Father and focused on the virtue of charity, the painful tragedy of our brothers and sisters in the coffee region is a test of our Christian fraternity," said Archbishop Alberto Giraldo Jaramillo of Medellin.

"Once again, the pain of those who have lost their loved ones and are now homeless is knocking at the doors of our hearts," he said, referring to the earthquakes that hit Colombia in 1995, 1994 and 1992.

The earthquake devastated 20 towns and villages in five provinces. Armenia, the capital city of Quindio province, experienced the worst damage, authorities said.

At least 940 were killed and an estimated 200,000 people were left homeless.

On Jan. 29 and 30, looters raided markets and a Red Cross warehouse in Armenia in search of household goods and food. Riot police arrested dozens of people.

Faced with shortages of food and clean water and a worsening public health situation, the government provided free buses to take people out of Armenia to Cali, Ibague and Manizales, outside the earthquake zone.

Archbishop Giraldo established a special collection for the victims, saying money would be collected in parishes Jan. 31 and in other Catholic institutions, such as schools, colleges and hospitals, Feb. 1.

"The help will be sent immediately to our fellow bishops of Armenia and Pereira, as a sign of ecclesial communion," Archbishop Giraldo said.

Speaking in Mexico City Jan. 25 near the end of a five-day visit, Pope John Paul expressed his sadness for the victims of the

earthquake.

"We show our love, being in solidarity with our brothers who are suffering at this time," he said.

According to official reports, half of the city of Armenia was destroyed. A CRS report said two-thirds of Armenia's buildings were uninhabitable.

"It's a complete catastrophe, and we will take years to rebuild the city. We're finding more bodies every minute," said state Gov. Henry Gomez.

EDITORS' NOTE: Contributions to the Catholic Medical Mission Board's medical relief in Colombia may be made by calling the agency's hot line, (800) 678-5659. Contributions to CRS may be made by phoning (800) 736-3467 or sending checks to CRS, P.O. Box 17090, Baltimore, MD 21203-7090.



Reuters/CNS

Catholic nuns hand out bags of food to earthquake survivors in Armenia, Colombia, Jan. 31. Thousands of survivors of the powerful quake were without food and water as supplies were scarce.

Two nuns slain in Sierra Leone

By Lynne Weil
Catholic News Service

ROME — Two kidnapped Missionaries of Charity nuns died in an exchange of gunfire between Sierra Leone rebels and pursuing troops.

Meanwhile, the rebels released three other nuns and an Italian brother.

Xaverian Brother Guglielmo Zambiasi, 34, and Sister Suchelle, superior of the Missionaries of Charity order in Kissy, Sierra Leone, were in good condition, the Italian missionary news service MISNA reported Jan. 31, two days after their release.

The missionaries and several other priests and religious had been seized in rebel raids on the Xaverian community in Kissy, east of the Sierra Leone capital of Freetown, Jan. 12 and 14. They were moved frequently to avoid detection and were rarely able to wash.

On Jan. 22, the rebels shot and killed Missionaries of Charity Sister Aloysius Maria, another nun in the hostage group, as they fled ECOMOG troops.

They also shot Xaverian Father Girolamo Pistoni, 43, in the chest, but the priest escaped by feigning death and waiting until the group left before he sought help.



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