

WORLD & NATION

Earthquake, floods plague Mexico

By Jim Hodgson
Catholic News Service

MEXICO CITY — The Mexican church's relief agency, Caritas, worked with other groups and government agencies to provide food, aid and shelter to victims of the country's recent earthquake and floods.

The Archdiocese of Mexico City announced Oct. 3 it would channel its aid through Caritas Mexico, and that it would include medicine, food and cash for the rebuilding of homes.

On Oct. 1, Cardinal Norberto Rivera Carrera of Mexico City issued a message of consolation and support for people in the Federal District and six states who suffered in the aftermath of the earthquake.

Mexico has developed "a spirit of solidarity and charity" in the years since an earthquake in 1985 killed at least 10,000 people in Mexico City, he said. He added that today, people pay more attention to prevention of disasters and to aiding victims.

"It is important to keep working in this direction so that corruption does not again generate human disasters that could be prevented," he added.

"Our prayer rises up to God for those people in the states that have been most affected, who lost their lives or their homes. May they find consolation for their pain and hope for a more fraternal society in the Lord of divine mercy," said Cardinal Rivera.

While mourning the deaths of at least 27 people in the wake of the Sept. 30 quake, which measured 7.5 on the open-ended Richter scale, thousands of Mexicans had to turn their attention to a new threat — massive flooding that followed heavy rains in the first days of October.

In the state of Oaxaca, southwest of Mexico City, 10,000 homes suffered serious damage in the earthquake. One cathedral and 50 other churches were also damaged. While no walls or roofs collapsed, the buildings suffered severe fractures and the cathedral's dome was cracked. Damage was also reported at the famed archaeological sites of Monte Alban and Mitla.



Reuters/CNS

Mileida Angeles and her brother, Humberto, walk amid the rubble of a fallen wall at their home in the village of San Miguel Tlanichico, Mexico, Oct. 1. A strong earthquake shook the southern state of Oaxaca Sept. 30, causing damage to homes and businesses.

Most of the deaths were reported in rural areas of Oaxaca, one of Mexico's poorest states. Rescue workers said Oct. 3 they expected the toll to rise as they reached isolated communities.

Heavy rains fell on Oaxaca in the days following the earthquake, hampering relief efforts and adding to the misery of people who lost their homes. In the Gulf Coast state of Veracruz, one person drowned and 10,000 were left homeless after pounding rains caused rivers to break their banks, sending water more than three feet deep into towns, the official Notimex news agency reported.

Serious flooding was also reported in Chiapas and Tabasco, where 10,000 people were evacuated from low-lying areas Oct. 3. The force of the Sept. 30 quake was approximately the same as the recent earthquakes in Taiwan, which took the lives of 2,000 people, and in Turkey, where 15,000 died, but well short of the

1985 earthquake in Mexico City that measured 8.1 on the Richter scale.

The series of natural disasters came in the days after more than 60 people were killed in an explosion in Celaya, Guanajuato, Sept. 26. At a memorial Mass celebrated in a soccer stadium Sept. 29, Bishop Jesus Humberto Velazquez Garay of Celaya called on authorities to speak the truth about the tragedy and not to hide the true death toll. The official death toll stood at 60, but rescue workers said they recorded 66 deaths.

The federal attorney general's department continued to investigate negligence and corruption among state and municipal authorities that witnesses said permitted the manufacture and storage of explosives near the city's main market and bus station. Four municipal tax officials were arrested and charged with corruption, and more arrests were expected to follow.

Vatican tags cohabitation study group

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — The Vatican invited a small group of scholars from around the world to examine the growing practice of unmarried couples living together, an official said.

About half a dozen experts will take part in a late-December meeting at the Pontifical Council for the Family, Msgr. Francesco di Felice, the council's undersecretary, said. The issue of cohabitation also surfaced during a Pontifical Council for the Family meeting Sept. 27-29 with the heads of the European bishops' family commissions.

Italian Cardinal Dionigi Tettamanzi of Genoa warned participants that "certain cultural forces of a radical character have the destruction of the family institution as their more or less manifest objective," a Vatican statement said.

The cardinal said that the importance of the family's foundation on marriage comes not so much from the demands of faith, but on the true good of society.

"The institution of marriage guarantees the nature of social commitment in favor of the weaker members, especially the children," the statement said. "Therefore, the stability which political powers must guarantee is not a strictly religious good, but a human good."

Cardinal Tettamanzi warned that laws making marriage just one of many personal union options would undermine society itself.

"A claimed equality between family and cohabitation on the part of society and civil law would introduce family models which cannot be compared in the slightest, and which result in damage to society," the statement said.



As a part of its mission, the Catholic Church seeks to safeguard life from the moment of conception through natural death. As we near the New Millennium and begin to consider the Jubilee themes emphasized by the Roman Catholic Church, we focus on life issues with a renewed spirit marked by feelings of reconciliation.

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