

ECUADORâ€™S QUAKE: NEWS WANES, NEEDS PERSIST

Op Ed 2016-05-05 09:35:00

New York City, NY - Nearly 30,000 people are in emergency shelters. Thousands of buildings are destroyed and major damage to infrastructure has burdened a cash-strapped country not equipped to respond to the crisis. That is the situation confronting Ecuador following the devastating 7.8 magnitude earthquake on April 16.

The sad reality is that media coverage is waning much too quickly for a disaster of this size and, consequently, so is public interest. The needs of Ecuadorians, however, are not waning. They persist. A glimpse of news from Ecuador and elsewhere in Latin America reveals great needs of the more than 750,000 people affected: humanitarian supplies, temporary shelter, assistance to traumatized communities, demolition and rubble removal, and rebuilding lives and family incomes.

Here in the U.S. we are readily distracted from the plight of Ecuador's quake victims by other international crises and opportunities and, of course, the primary election contests. But in Ecuador, the suffering continues.

Behind the scenes, one organization is working mightily to channel aid to Ecuador's quake victims: the Pan American Development Foundation (PADF), an affiliate of the Organization of American States (OAS). Established in the 1960s by John Kennedy's Alliance for Progress with the dynamic leadership of OAS Secretary General and former Ecuadorian president Galo Plaza Lasso, PADF continues to implement vital development projects in the region.

Immediately after the quake, the Foundation mobilized its Ecuadorian NGO partners to deliver much-needed humanitarian supplies to isolated rural communities near the earthquake's epicenter. For nearly six decades, the Foundation has responded to every major disaster in Latin America and the Caribbean. Its story should be better known.

In January 2010, when an earthquake struck Haiti, PADF was among the first responders, shipping relief supplies from Santo Domingo and Miami, and opening a humanitarian corridor to Port-au-Prince. This is just one example of the agility and speed of PADF. It has aided victims of drought in La Guajira department in northern Colombia, volcanic eruptions in Colombia and Ecuador, hurricanes and tropical storms in the Caribbean, droughts and earthquakes in Central America, and floods and other humanitarian crises throughout the region.

An independent 501 (c) (3) nonprofit, the Foundation has developed successful public-private partnerships with leading U.S. corporations wishing to invest in the social development of the region. Today, corporate partners like Royal Caribbean Cruises Ltd. and private donors continue to support PADF programs, such as the response in Ecuador.

"We have been touched by the overwhelming needs of so many people along the Ecuadorian coast," says John Sanbrailo, PADF Executive Director. "Families have lost their homes, their livelihoods and their sense of security. The pain they are experiencing is indescribable. This is why we must do more to provide the assistance they urgently need and help them to begin rebuilding their lives."

As Ecuador begins the recovery process, the country can draw upon experienced international organizations like PADF that specialize in the region and are familiar with and sensitive to the needs of local communities.

For my part, I know PADF is dedicated to creating sustainable development that will allow Ecuador to flourish long after the rubble has been cleared. These are the kind of long-term partners it will need to rebuild, and we should support their efforts in any way we can.

As I reflect on Ecuador's tragedy, I am reminded of the saying, "There but for the grace of God go I." Contributions can be made at www.padf.org/HelpEcuador

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