

Hundreds die in El Salvador earthquake

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It only lasted 30 seconds, but it will take many days to determine the scope of the damage resulting from the earthquake that shook Central America off the coast of El Salvador on Saturday, January 13 at 11:34 a.m. Monday morning's figures indicate that nearly 500 are dead, 1,077 wounded and some 2,000 disappeared.

Eight thousand homes have been destroyed and another sixteen thousand are severely damaged. Some 12,000 have been left homeless. El Salvador President Francisco Flores requested 3,000 coffins from Colombia.

The earthquake, rated at between 7.6 and 7.9 points on the Richter scale, had its epicenter under the Pacific Ocean, 110 miles off of southeastern El Salvador. The shaking was also felt in Mexico, Honduras, Nicaragua and Guatemala. The most concentrated damage was in Las Colinas, Department of Santa Tecla, a middle-class suburb of the Salvadoran capital that now lies buried in dust and debris.

Rescue squads are working under very difficult conditions. There have been over 500 aftershocks since the temblor, causing interruptions in the rescue effort.

Salvadorans still remember the earthquake of October 10, 1986, which caused the deaths of 1,400 people. From a geological standpoint, Saturday's quake and the 1986 quake had different impacts. Saturday's earthquake was typical of a subduction zone, in which one geologic plate slides under another, releasing large amounts of energy. This type of quake tends to have a wave-like pattern that affects apartment buildings and other elevated structures. The 1986 quake resulted from movements along the faults in El Salvador. This produced intense shaking, destroying many small structures and shanties.

In Las Colinas the earthquake literally peeled off the side of hill, which then buried the elegant suburb, built on the area's foothills.

In San Salvador, the capital city, many roads, 12

apartment buildings, stores and public buildings are severely damaged, forcing citizens to sleep in the streets. The vast majority of the affected in San Salvador are poor inhabitants of apartment buildings and substandard housing. In all, about 2,400 were left homeless in that city. Among the dead and injured are the passengers of a city bus that was split in half by falling rocks.

The 700 homes of Las Colinas, just 20 kilometers from San Salvador, were buried under a massive earth-slide. By Sunday night rescue teams had unearthed 200 bodies. One youth was found alive. The numbers of dead are expected to increase dramatically, since entire families were buried under as their homes collapsed over them. The possibility of finding survivors is almost nil, according to a spokesman for the Salvadorian government, "due to the incredible amount of earth that fell on the homes, virtually crushing them." More than 1,000 people are presumed to be buried in Las Colinas

The adjacent suburbs of Paraiso, Cima del Paraiso and Las Flores, Pinares de Suiza and Nueva San Salvador are in extreme danger of further earth-slides and inhabitants are being evacuated to soccer stadiums.

South of San Salvador some communities have been left isolated from earth-slides that buried highways. Several hospitals have been severely damaged. It appears that the death toll could have been much worse in that region, but for the fact that many citizens were at work in the coffee harvest when the earthquake struck.

In Guatemala six people were killed and three are missing. In Nicaragua two new earthquakes took place, triggered by the Saturday earthquake. In Mexico City buildings shook, and there are reports of damage to structures in the southern Mexican State of Chiapas.

A preliminary assessment by one of San Salvador's dailies, *El Diario de Hoy*, indicates that, as in 1986, the death toll could have been significantly reduced if

greater control had been exercised over building practices in El Salvador. Many homes are still built out of adobe (a mud and straw mixture) and on unstable landfill, on hillsides and in ravines.



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