10-22-1986

Ten Days After The Earthquake In San Salvador: Notes

Deborah Tyroler

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/noticen

Recommended Citation

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Latin America Digital Beat (LADB) at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in NotiCen by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact amywinter@unm.edu.
Ten Days After The Earthquake In San Salvador: Notes

by Deborah Tyroler

Category/Department: General
Published: Wednesday, October 22, 1986

In the following, a journalist's impressions of San Salvador, 10 days after the earthquake which decimated about 40% of the city are summarized. The report derives from a feature story by Jorge Luna broadcast by PRENSA LATINA on Oct. 20. Automobile windshields in the capital city display signs stating that "El Salvador is standing on its feet." Meanwhile, corpses are still being dug out of the wreckage, and several multi-story buildings are tilted in such a way that they threaten to collapse amid clouds of dust. People on the streets in this city of one million inhabitants walk around looking dazed, angry or resigned, or some combination of all three. Residents refer to San Salvador as the "quaked city," and small boys point to buildings which were flattened in seconds, saying they went down in "one single cracker." "As the Salvadoran Red Cross ambulance in which we are traveling passes through the streets, pedestrians stare at the ´soccorristas,´ as the Red Cross is called here, in urgent claims for everything. They all want...the driver to stop, just for a minute. They ask for water, bandages, medicines. One woman asked for a piece zinc sheet to cover her mud and cane hut. "Volunteers of the Red Cross, the Church, other private institutions, and the Army, are everywhere. "At nearly all street corners in the city are young people in black or camouflage fatigues, with rifles practically bigger than they are. The war goes on. "Captain Garcia of the Bracamonte special battalion is in charge of security at the Comalapa international airport. He mocks us, 'You journalists always think we are the people's oppressors.' There are always three of four security guards at his back. "The entire capital city...is filled with people bent to the tasks of raising San Salvador from the wreckage. Dangerous areas are cordoned off by brigades of workers in straw hats... Telephones litter the sidewalks amid fruit vendors and the stench of corpses. "...Salvadoran pediatrician Carlos Martinez moved fast during the quake. He took advantage of the ten-minute break between the first two tremors to help evacuate 300 children from the city's main pediatric hospital to a nearby soccer field. Now there are 12 blue tents erected there for his small patients. "He complained that some people are afraid to take their children to his makeshift hospital. "Although we are short in almost everything, we are still working." "...Our ambulance was stopped several times at military checkpoints, another way of reminding us of the conflict with the rebels continues...There is a temporary truce in effect since the earthquake, thanks to the rebels. "But the war is also being waged on the walls that survived the quakes. Everywhere one encounters political graffiti. "In front of a damaged commercial house with a red neon sign still miraculously blinking a green wall bears a slogan common in many Latin American cities: 'Yankees Get Out.' Next door to 'Pete's' of the red neon is the remains of the US Embassy complex. The Embassy resembles a fortress rather than a bunker, protected by machine guns and orange-painted steel wire fence. From the outside, the complex appears undamaged. "Salvadorans say that regardless of official statistics which change by the minute, there are at least 2,000 dead, and 200,000 homeless." Material damage estimates range from $1 billion to $2 billion. There are amusing stories emerging in the midst of the chaos, said Luna. One example is that of a hippopotamus which escaped from the city zoo and barged into a school for Catholic nuns. Another making the rounds tells of a statue of Christopher Columbus which alas, lost its head.
-- End --