

# In Peru, a Grim Procession Amid Quake's Rubble

## City Buries Its Dead As Search Continues

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PISCO, Peru, Aug. 17 -- Even the cemetery was in ruins, the tombstones cracked and the mausoleums skirted with piles of rubble.

Carlos Zuñiga and his granddaughter, Maria, 17, blankly watched as another parade of polished coffins passed by -- about the only objects in this city not filmed in a thick dust.

Two days before, Maria had been chatting on the second floor of her home with her mother and grandmother about buying a new dresser. The next thing she knew, she recalled, she was being pulled from under a sheet of concrete and everyone was telling her how lucky she was. But she didn't feel fortunate. Her mother and grandmother were dead under the same rubble, among the estimated 510 people killed by the earthquake that shook [Peru's](#) coast on Wednesday.

On Friday, she and her grandfather followed their relatives' coffins into [Pisco's](#) main cemetery, completing a grim journey that continues to be repeated here as more bodies are pulled from the debris, more coffins are filled, and more families try to restore some semblance of normality to their upended lives.

"The family below us all died," Maria said, while a man with a pickax continued to dig her mother's grave. After a couple of seconds, she added: "Of asphyxiation."

The Zuñigas are like a lot of families in this working-class city of 116,000, living together in part of a simply constructed, boxy building. Carlos Zuñiga, 67, spends his workdays to the north in [Lima](#), enduring a 250-mile round-trip bus ride that a modest salary makes bearable. His ride home on Thursday, after he was stranded in the capital overnight, gave him a vivid glimpse of what had become of the arid strip of coastline most affected by the 8.0-magnitude quake.

The evidence was subtle in Lima, but his bus windows soon provided a glimpse of progressive destruction. About halfway into the four-hour ride, he saw people lining the road with plastic buckets, hoping for water trucks. Brick walls painted with political slogans from this year's election were half-collapsed, scrambling the letters of candidates' names. The bus slowed as it neared Pisco; the quake had ripped 10-foot-deep ruts into the convulsed asphalt.

He said he had to walk the final five miles to what was left of his house. Only then did he understand what it looks like when 70 percent of a city's buildings are reduced to rock and dust.

"I don't know how this could ever be rebuilt," he said. "What can be done when suddenly there is nothing?"

Like most people here who lost homes and family members, he was drawn to the central plaza. In the days following the quake, the flat expanse of relatively empty space has become a hospital, a morgue and a lifeline for those desperate for food and water.

"We evacuate people to Lima if we can't keep them here," said Carlos Orellana, a doctor supervising about 100 emergency care personnel working in tents in the square. "But as the days go on, it's more cadavers than survivors."

Dozens of bodies have been pulled from the ruins of the [San Clemente](#) church, which sits directly across from the hospital tents. The church collapsed in the quake while hundreds of worshippers were inside, celebrating a holiday -- the Feast of the Assumption of the [Virgin Mary](#) - - and a memorial Mass for a man who had died a month earlier. At least 50 bodies have

reportedly been found so far. On Friday afternoon, rescue workers combed through the debris, occasionally hefting black body bags to the plaza's sidewalk.

As workers unzipped one body bag, a crowd of onlookers elbowed for a glimpse.

"Woman or man?" yelled Luis Martinez, 47.

Like nearly everyone else there, he had been looking at bodies for two days. He was searching for his 14-year-old daughter, Anahi. A friend of Martinez climbed a nearby tree for a bird's-eye view.

"Too old," he yelled to Martinez before jumping down.

Less than a minute later, four men hoisted another coffin from the square and began to walk toward the cemetery, where the Zuñigas continued to wait for their family grave to be dug.

When the graves were finally finished, Carlos Zuñiga watched his daughter's casket being lowered into place, and the casket of his wife of 45 years placed atop hers.

"They died together as if they were hugging," he said, pressing an index finger under his glasses.

Maria was embraced by an older brother whose face was streaked with scars and partly covered by a bloody bandage.

Workers eventually covered the coffin with dirt and cement. Carlos Zuñiga wept and stumbled from the grave, accidentally kicking a piece of rubble that lay in his path.

As he and other relatives left the center of the cemetery, they returned to city streets that were filled with coffins streaming toward them.

In a clearing just outside the cemetery's main wall, hundreds of people milled around and workers dug dozens of new holes in the ground.