

Thousands in Peru Lack Food, Water

Relief Stymied by Broken Roads, Looting

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LIMA, Peru, Aug. 18 -- Word leaked Friday night that several relief workers were sleeping in a seminary in the shattered town of Ica. The news instantly transformed the building into a tempting target for those desperate for supplies since Wednesday's 8.0-magnitude earthquake.

"The building was attacked twice during the night, but fortunately the windows were barred, so they weren't able to get in," Aaron Skrocki, emergency program manager for Catholic Relief Services in [South America](#), said on Saturday. "Because of the lack of electricity here, it's difficult to tell whether the groups are five people or 50."

Such acts of desperation are complicating the already problematic delivery of much-needed humanitarian aid to areas most affected by the quake, which killed more than 500 people and left tens of thousands homeless.

[Peru's](#) president, [Alan García](#), dispatched more military forces to the region Saturday to combat looting and theft and to ensure that supplies reach those most in need.

García, who has tried to calm citizens by assuring them that aid is on the way, promised to ensure its continued distribution.

"My obligation is to establish order in the country, and we're going to do that today, whatever it takes," García told reporters during a tour of the area Saturday, according to local television reports.

The cities most affected by the disaster -- Chincha, [Pisco](#) and Ica -- are all linked by the Pan-American Highway, which runs along Peru's coastline. Parts of the road buckled during the tremor and are now rutted. Traffic is often reduced to a crawl, leaving trucks loaded with aid idling for hours at a time.

Many relief organizations have tried to center aid efforts in Pisco, a city of about 116,000. On Friday and Saturday, thousands stood in long lines in the city's central square for water bottles, pasta, canned goods and other basics.

The highway entrance to Pisco is particularly vulnerable to looting, because the main point of access from the north is a bridge that has been reduced to one lane. Lines of vehicles stretch for miles, making trucks and aid vehicles sitting ducks for roving bands of looters.

On Friday afternoon, for example, young men raced among the idling vehicles north of the bridge, trying to identify which might be carrying aid. They ransacked a truck that was sitting in traffic directly in front of a local station of Peru's national police. Men and women screamed for help from police officers, though none came from the station.

Three police officers who happened to be sitting in the back of one of the buses on the road raced out of the vehicle and through the streets, tackling one of the looters and dragging him into the station.

"What is happening to my Peru?" an elderly woman moaned, watching the scene unfold from inside the bus.

Scenes like that have been repeated often, eliciting similar reactions of distress among Peruvians all over the country, who for the most part have energetically supported and contributed to the aid efforts, despite the problems of distribution.

In [Lima](#), which was largely spared by the quake, tons of items have been donated, and television reports have showed warehouses full of supplies.

Because of the problems on the highway, aid organizations have increasingly depended on airlifts to try to get those supplies from Lima to an air force base near Pisco, about 125 miles to the south.

Donations have poured in from relief agencies and governments all over the world, totaling at least \$40 million so far, according to government estimates.

As workers struggle to get that aid to the three main cities affected, thousands of people in nearby rural communities have remained essentially isolated, though the damage they suffered was equally devastating in many cases.

Workers with [Oxfam International](#) tried to assess damage to outlying areas on Friday, visiting Pisco's neighboring districts of Independencia and Humay.

In Humay, the workers found that 173 houses had completely collapsed -- and that nearly every other house was so damaged as to be uninhabitable -- leaving 3,200 people homeless. "No one had been there yet, and we found at least 500 families in need," said Danny Gibson, with Oxfam International's office in Peru. "They don't have electricity or running water, of course, and they are running out of food."

According to CARE Peru, which is working on relief efforts with the Peruvian government, the town of Tambo de Mora, southwest of Chincha, suffered damage to 90 percent of its homes.

Farther inland, residents in the region of Huancavelica -- the poorest in Peru -- had no access to clean water. Landslides blocked the entry of 30 buses to areas in need of water, according to CARE.

Many of the farmers in the devastated areas grow crops such as cotton, tomatoes and beans. Because of the arid conditions, they rely on irrigation canals. Damage to those canals has the farmers worried about both short- and long-term consequences of the earthquake.

