

# Peru quake victims battle hunger, cold

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PISCO, Peru --

An unforgiving wind lashes Juan Escate as he huddles around a bonfire with his three children, chilling him as he ponders how to fulfill his wife's dying plea.

Last week's magnitude-8 earthquake sent Escate's home on the outskirts of Pisco tumbling down, burying his wife Doris in rubble as she rushed their 16-year-old daughter to safety.

"Promise me you'll take care of my children," he says were his wife's last words.

The quake forced Escate and thousands of others in this impoverished port city on Peru's central coast into crudely constructed shelters. Icy ocean winds carry sand from the beaches and people keep watch all night against thieves.

Adults say they are given a handful of rice with some potatoes at midday. Children receive hot oatmeal for breakfast. Civil Defense has distributed tents to some survivors, but most are still in flimsy makeshift shelters near their homes made from pieces of wood and plastic sheets.

Escate's eyes are fixed on a giant pot of steaming rice and potatoes. The food is not for him and his hungry neighbors but for the group of soldiers protecting the homeless families from robbery - aid is more valuable now than personal belongings.

"I don't know what I'm going to do. My children were left without a mother and I have to take care of them alone," said Escate, his hands callused from years as a garbage collector. The 16-year-old daughter survived but suffered a fractured hip and is in a Lima hospital.

"She doesn't know her mother has left us," he said, sitting with his three sons, ages 5, 8 and 10. The youngest was crying, a thick wool blanket up to his eyes. The other two sat close to their father, listening intently.

More than 85 percent of the homes here were destroyed and at least 340 people were killed in this city of 90,000 according to Civil Defense officials. Over all, the earthquake killed 514 in several cities, according to the Civil Defense.

Wrapped in thick, scratchy blankets, survivors listen to the sound of the crackling fire that burns on one of the few street corners in the San Clemente district not blocked by dusty rubble.

Juan Camasca, 37, said 50 of his neighbors were lucky enough to eat a small piece of chicken after one of the community members slaughtered his animals to feed them.

He said life is hardest on the outskirts of Pisco, where aid is pouring in and is available in more than a dozen points throughout the city, but passing by those just outside.

"The aid came for three days after the earthquake," Camasca said. "They gave us water, hot water even, but they stopped coming." He said he watched his friends unsuccessfully try to flag down trucks full of food that didn't even slow down.

Last week, a 6-week-old infant died of pneumonia after sleeping with her family outside their badly damaged home in the nearby province of Canete. Family members were worried that the house would topple over from one of the strong aftershocks, which continued for days. They complained that humanitarian aid did not reach them.

President Alan Garcia announced this week that electricity had returned to much of the devastated region. But large areas of Pisco remain without lights. Bonfires illuminate the shadows in the tent cities on its outskirts. The government has said that rebuilding coastal towns will cost about \$220 million.

Ten people are sleeping in Escate's shelter, lighted by a candle stuck precariously to a wooden plank. Two soldiers peek through the blanket that serves as the door, to make sure everyone is safe.

"A group of people who came by car tried to loot here, but the town drove them out and they were captured," said Jorge Huaman, a soldier patrolling the area, rubbing his hands together to keep warm.

Food is scarce, and government aid has been patchy, especially to rural areas. U.N. Assistant Secretary-General Margareta Wahlstrom, the deputy emergency relief coordinator, said there is enough water, food, sheeting and blankets in the country, but that aid efforts here have been poorly organized.

"There've been many actors in place, and there hasn't been good enough coordination so that the direction the government has given has been suitably followed," she said Friday.

Garcia's government has also blamed the country's Civil Defense for not acting quickly and effectively.