

Death Toll in Colombia Mudslides Hits 293 as Recovery Continues



Bogota, April 5 (RHC)-- The death toll from mudslides in Colombia's southern city of Mocoa has risen to 293 with more than 200 injured. The city, which was inundated early Saturday morning after nearby rivers burst, is now identifying and burying its dead, continuing the relief effort and turning an eye to reconstruction after the tragedy.

While in Mocoa Monday night, Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos announced that at least one hundred bodies had already been given over to families for burial. However, for other families, identifying and returning the bodies of loved ones is proving to be a slow and painful process. A team of 45 criminologists has been sent by the Colombian attorney general's office to assist with speeding up the identification process.

Search efforts led by soldiers, citizens, firefighters and the Red Cross to rescue any survivors still caught in rubble and mud are continuing, but are expected to soon come to an end.

The government has already declared a state of emergency in the region and around \$14 million dollars has been allocated for relief efforts in the area. The government has also started a vaccination program to

mitigate the risk of outbreaks of diseases, and thousands of people are being given shelter and children are receiving food packages.

The city is still without running water and the majority of its citizens are without electricity, with people walking the streets with candles and torches and masks to block out the clouds of dust stirring from the drying mud.

Santos has also promised to build a new water supply and hospital for the city and “rebuild homes that are not going to be at high-risk sites.” Colombian Defense Minister, Luis Carlos Villegas, who is helping to coordinate reconstruction, noted that the process could take up to three years.

Making reference to surveying by the Air Force, Santos said that there was no immediate danger of another mudslide at the moment, but he also said that the region should be prepared for more rain, which is expected to last until June. Colombia’s Hydrology Institute warned that around 12 million people — 31 percent of Colombia’s population — are at risk of being affected by similar floods.

Santos said earlier that climate change was responsible for the disaster that hammered the city with one-third of its regular monthly rainfall in just one night, causing the Mocoa river and its tributaries to burst their banks, washing away entire neighborhoods.

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