200 Feared Killed as Quake Rips Colombia

From Times Wire Services

POPAKYAN, Colombia—A major earthquake struck this mountain country on Thursday, devastating this mountain city where hundreds of tourists had gathered for Holy Week. Estimates of the casualties ranged up to 200 dead and 500 injured.

A witness said the shuddering earth "sent the tourists running, a houses flying into the air as a cloud of dust covered the city." Another said "whole walls were collapsing" and the noise was deafening.

From the air Popayan looked as if it had been bombed. Dust rose 1,000 feet over the city.

The quake, measuring 5.3 on the Richter scale, according to the U.S. Geological Survey, struck at 8:15 a.m., knocking down buildings around the historic center, some of them as tall as residents slept late on Holy Thursday, a national holiday. The quake brought the height of the cathedral down on as many as 100 worshipers. Police said 25 bodies were recovered from the rubble of the church.

Rescuers Weep Openly

Four lines of rescuers passed bricks and timbers hand to hand to free the trapped worshipers. Some of the rescuers, their hands bleeding from handling the jagged rubble, wept openly in the street.

Popayan, at the foot of the active Paricutin Volcano, has a population of 125,000, but during Holy Week it grows to twice that number. Tourists from Colombia and other nations flock to the city, which has world-famous processions and religious ceremonies. Some are televised nationwide.

San Jose Hospital reported that 600 injured people were admitted. Doctors there said supplies of plaster, medicine and even surgical thread were exhausted by mid-morning.

Police said 35 bodies were recovered from homes and stores in Popayan. Others reported fires raging in some parts of the city.

In residential areas many people were dazed by the shock, wandered through the rubble. Others took charge of crying children who had lost their parents.

Mayor Luis Guillermo Balzan said his city was "almost destroyed" and that at least 3,000 houses were in ruins.

President Belisario Betancur, who flew to Popayan shortly after the quake, said Popayan was put under military control to avoid looting. The government said the United States, Venezuela and Panama sent planes with food, medicines, tents and other supplies.

Betancur said that more than 100 people died. A U.S. embassy official, however, said "the death toll has been put at about 200, and still climbing." At Laun, embassy information officer in Bogota, said he had heard reports from casualty reports filtering in from the devastated area.

The Andean Geophysics Institute said the quake lasted 18 seconds and was followed by two other, minor tremors within the next half-hour. The institute said the quake's epicenter was 60 miles west of Popayan.

Colombia Officials Sell Food to Quake Survivors as Relief Supplies Pile Up

Mon., April 4, 1983

ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

Relief Aid Being Sold In Colombia

POPAKYAN, Colombia (AP) — Some tents for the homeless were selling for $35 each, supposedly deep-freezed food was costing up to $2 a pound, and people were begging for medical attention in the aftermath of the earthquake that devastated this Andean city.

The quake struck this city of 200,000 people early Thursday, destroying homes and a crowded cathedral, killing at least 240 people, injuring hundreds more and leaving three-quarters of the population homeless. The government relief office said 12,000 buildings had been destroyed.

Earthquake relief aid that began arriving Friday from Canada, the United States, France and other countries was still piled up Sunday in warehouses under control of military authorities.

The Colombian radio network, Todelar, described the relief effort as chaotic. One group was reported to be standing by the doors of a police station demanding tents.
Red Cross to Run Colombia Quake Relief

**Red Cross to Run Colombia Quake Relief**

**POPAYAN, Colombia** (AP) — The state governor’s committee administering relief to survivors of the Popayan earthquake bowed Tuesday to charges of inefficiency, profiteering and misuse of relief supplies and announced that it will let the Red Cross take over relief operations.

Committee member Angel Mosquera said after a meeting of the 12-member emergency group that effective immediately, the Red Cross alone will be responsible for distribution of all food, medicine, tents and clothing.

“A lot of mistakes have been made,” Mosquera said.

“All of the responsibility for what has happened falls on our shoulders.”

A variety of sources in Popayan confirmed an Associated Press report Sunday, denied by officials in Bogota, that relief tents were sold and distributed free. The sources had more reports of misuse of the supplies, particularly by the Colombian army.

Iglesias, a member of the Red Cross, said Tuesday that after last week’s quake, which killed at least 200 people and left 160,000 homeless, the Red Cross tried to move in quickly and start a relief program. She said Gov. Amalia Salazar’s emergency committee blocked the agency’s efforts.

Tents, generators, medicines and clothing began pouring in from Colombian cities and abroad Friday, but the governor’s committee and the army, working together, repeatedly confiscated the relief aid destined for the Red Cross, she said.

On Saturday, the army confiscated 460 tents donated by the United States, then on Sunday said it had only 206 and would not give them up, Iglesias said.

Reporters were not allowed into the army’s temporary base near the airport, but an AP reporter flying over the area and the adjoining police barracks saw 30 of the blue-and-white U.S. tents set up there.

**Relief Aid Diverted**

Iglesias said the army on Monday seized two trucks arriving in Popayan with relief aid from the Red Cross at Barranquilla, and the Red Cross has not seen the material yet.

Red Cross relief coordinator Fernando Gómez said 14 portable g veterinary clinic flown Sunday from the Spanish Red Cross, but the governor’s committee confiscated six of them and turned them over to the army.

Gov. Salazar told the Associated Press that her committee ordered all relief aid stockpiled under its control because it believed it could distribute it best. But Mosquera said that because the quake struck at the beginning of the Easter holiday, many committee members were away, and it took several days to get the group organized.

An AP reporter found the government’s marketing and agriculture agency, IDEMA, selling food to refugees Saturday at its downtown warehouse, which survived the earthquake. President Belisario Betancur objected to the report and said IDEMA also had been donating food to refugees.

However, the head of the government’s Family Welfare Institute office in Popayan, Fernando Iragorri, said Tuesday that IDEMA had distributed the food and would not begin to give it away until today.

The selling of tents apparently occurred when the governor’s committee handed them over to neighborhood food vendors instead of setting up tents in refuge compounds as the Red Cross recommended.

Residents of one neighborhood said over a local radio station that representatives of the Alfonso Lopez suburb neighborhood action committee tried to sell the tents that were delivered to them.

The governor’s committee said it is investigating the accusation.

“We know there are incidents of politics in the communal action groups, where people who really don’t need aid are being favored,” Mosquera said.

He said tents in the hands of people who don’t need them will be confiscated and turned over to the Red Cross.