

## >> 30 days after the catastrophe in Ecuador

Quito >> 05 >> 2016

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**E**ccuador, one month after the earthquake, continues to process its worst tragedy of the past 70 years. Never in recent history has this society watched the gruesome spectacle of constructions being toppled, destroyed, overturned, the halved roads or collapsed highways. Something only viewed before in movies, something only seen in the news that happened in other countries like Chile, Haiti or Japan but never to us.

Red balances at May 11, 2016 indicated 660 dead, 14 missing people and around seven thousand buildings destroyed. However, another thing is to witness over and over again the images of tragedy, the dead within the rubble, homeless families without anything, children without parents, and parents without children; stories that become relentlessly more tragic.

172 are reported dead in the town of Pedernales, a coastal town of 60,000 people that has doubled its population since 2011 when finally had a highway that allowed the citizens of Montequinto to get there in about 4 hours. The small town was then filled with inns and hotels, clubs, restaurants and bars, which collapsed instantly in the earthquake. It is now known that these buildings did not meet the minimum building standards; another angle of the tragedy.

Nearly 60,000 volunteers have signed up to continue helping the victims. The number falls short before thousands of people, nationals and foreigners who work without registration and selflessly in the disaster zone or organizing the help needs from the big cities. This is the other side of the coin before



such destruction, because still being dazed, the Ecuadorians (the earthquake was felt throughout the country and much of Colombia and Peru), two hours after the earthquake, they began with the relief and aid efforts to the victims. The first week after the quake will remain in the collective memory of the country and will be one of the most honorable in the life of every citizen. It was sublime to see those crowds in streets and squares filled with mattresses, food, medicines, water, clothing; loading, fixing, opening and closing covers, packing and depositing in trucks for them to urgently depart, amid the applause and massive hug of the population.

We are in the slow stage of the "normalization of activities." The fact is that poverty wanders around hostels filled with those that have been dispossessed of everything and are in desperate need of daily sustenance. Manabi was hit the hardest by the quake, this province is famous for the kindness and tenacity of its people; in one of the most affected cities, Calceta, there are several walls covered in graffiti saying: "To tie Calceta". The history of this sentence reflects the courage of its citizens: some years ago Calceta soccer team trailed 11-0 after 89 minutes against another team of that province; on the minute 90 Calceta scored a goal and someone in the stands stood up and shouted "to draw Calceta" this cry gripped the stands and although the game ended 11-1, the occurrence became the blazon of the city. There, thanks to his claim, are today the best hostels and the inhabitants manage to rebuild their small businesses and face adversity. In fact, a city assemblywoman, Lidice Larrea, is now the Minister of Inclusion, where the support has been centralized.

Normalization unfortunately implies oblivion. TV newscasts resume their daily agenda and increasingly devote less space to the earthquake and the victims, and dangerously there are now less volunteers and the international aid (generous, abundant, warm and from the whole world) is also ebbing. Therefore, everything is being left in the hands of the government that sent a draft law to Parliament which arises for a year the VAT for all purchases and wages and earnings of employees are taxed, equity worth over one million dollars is imposed with contributions and the sale of some state enterprises is projected. This has caused the violent reaction of the political opposition that has been ruthless with the regime of Rafael Correa for the last 6 months, describing this law as unnecessary as the government already has emerging resources provided by multilateral organizations by a range USD 1 billion. The President predicted in the early days that the cost of rebuilding could be USD 3 billion so insists in defending the project.

That's another facet of the "normalization": returning to the verbal fisticuffs with a view to the elections of February 2017 as the third largest province of Ecuador in population struggles in a situation of uncertainty, wounded in the heart of its productive infrastructure: Manabi loses USD 4 million daily in exports from April 16, 2016, a day that will be impossible to forget.



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