

**UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS AND
EMERGENCY RELIEF COORDINATOR, STEPHEN O'BRIEN**

**MEMBER STATES BRIEFING ON ECUADOR
NEW YORK/GENEVA, 22 APRIL 2016**

As delivered

Thank you very much indeed to the Ambassador for her introductory words and for setting out the current situation with such clarity and with such cogency. I very much salute both her and her Government for all that they are doing.

And I want to say thank you very much indeed to everyone in the room in Geneva, Excellencies, for filling what I am told is a packed room. I think that demonstrates the interest and the solidarity that we all feel with the Ecuadorean people. The nature of these natural events is a lottery around the world and when it hits one country, we all want to show how we can support each other.

Yesterday, I returned from Ecuador which, as you know, suffered this devastating 7.8 magnitude earthquake and that was at 6:58 in the evening last Saturday. I expressed our collective support for the response efforts by the Government of Ecuador and our deep solidarity with the people who have suffered such loss and injury and damage to their lives, their livelihoods and their homes.

I was able to see the impact of the earthquake and to ensure that the international humanitarian response is fully supportive of Ecuadorean needs.

The Government estimates, as you just heard, that over 580 people have lost their lives and over 8,300 people have been injured. Sadly, this number may yet rise, of course, as relief efforts continue. I think it is worth noting that as this earthquake struck, near the very beautiful coast along which there are many hotels, which have been destroyed. There are of course, in addition to all the local people, known to be tourists in hotels which have been destroyed, and remain in perilous conditions and remain unaccounted for, which adds to the complexity of the rescue.

Some 2,000 buildings have been destroyed or severely damaged and some 280 schools affected. At least 720,000 people are directly affected. I saw for myself in Pedernales, the centre is reduced to mostly rubble. In Manta, many homes and buildings are randomly collapsed. Streets and pavement are cracked and raised many feet, and many structures left at dangerous and precarious angles.

Also, in Ecuador, I met officials from the Government, including the Ministers of Defence and Foreign Affairs, who highlighted the magnitude of the crisis for their country and they welcomed the coordinated international assistance. And I met many Ministers who are all deeply engaged and pulling together.

After initial meetings in the capital, I immediately headed to the most affected areas. There, I met, listened, and talked to survivors of this tragedy, including some who had been pulled out from under the rubble four days after the earthquake. Some of them were staying in temporary hospital tents in a car park because the main hospital in Manta was damaged. Their testimony was heart wrenching.

Rosa – and that is not her real name – a teenager so traumatised she needs immediate psychosocial support and she will for years to come. And pulled out on the fourth day, Nicolas, a man in his forties, he survived but his wife perished right next to him. Throughout my visit, I was able to see the enormity of the devastation.

But I was also able to see how the Ecuadorean people are already fully engaged in removing rubble, re-opening stores and getting their lives back on track, step by step. There was a deep sense of resilience and steadfastness, and it was inspiring.

The Government of Ecuador has demonstrated strong leadership in the response effort, mobilizing in-country responders and providing rapid support to affected communities. The Government has also set up a line of credit for US\$600 million for reconstruction efforts. Upon their request, and in support of their work, the United Nations system and its partner organizations are supporting the Government's response efforts.

The international community responded immediately with neighbouring countries such as Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, El Salvador, Mexico, Panama, Peru, Venezuela, the Dominican Republic and also Spain, taking the lead within hours of the quake. A full United Nations Disaster Assessment (UNDAC) Team composed of needs assessment and coordination experts, as well as information managers, was deployed within 24 hours. The INSARAG network supported the deployment with over 14 international search and rescue teams from 10 countries for the first phase of recovery of survivors. This phase is now drawing to its close and I am sure Missions will have noted that no more USAR teams are needed as confirmed by the Ecuadorean Government in its recent Note Verbale.

Coordination mechanism hubs are up and running in affected areas, including in Manta, Portoviejo, and in other coastal cities where the Government, NGOs and other national and international partners are responding to the needs of thousands of people left homeless and vulnerable to contaminated drinking water and the risk of water-borne and mosquito-vector diseases.

Coordination is crucial in such circumstances and as discussed with the Secretary of Emergency Response, who was keen to see professional, coherent and well-coordinated international response to support the national efforts. This is a call that we must heed as we seek to optimise

the effectiveness of a fully coordinated international response to support and complement the Ecuadorean Government's response; where senior Ministers of the Government have been posted to lead the recovery and reconstruction efforts in each of the main areas of devastation and population.

The Flash Appeal launched today, less than one week after the terrible earthquake, calls for US\$72.7 million to assist people in need over the next three months. I have also decided to release \$7 million through the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) to rapidly scale up the life-saving assistance and to support the coordinated, coherent efforts of humanitarian partners. I thank those Member States who have already responded and call today on all others to do likewise. It is the best, most immediate, practical, effective and coordinated way we can all stand in solidarity with Ernesto, in Tarqui, Manta, who was on the opposite side of the street to his own home, as he watched his house collapse on top of his wife and his son, killing them between two concrete slabs. I talked to him at length, in that street, right by his house; he was being very brave and it is up to us now to stand with him and this is the best way we can do it.

While the focus is now on immediate emergency relief I also stress that we must build development gains into the response up front, support the national and local capacities, and continue to listen to the people. The people affected by this earthquake - they are the ones who know best what they need, as highlighted by the Secretary-General in his vision and the report that he wrote for the World Humanitarian Summit which is coming up on 23-24 May. Moreover, the expertise and lessons learned from previous disasters will be harnessed to ensure that the people of Ecuador receive the best possible assistance.

Based on what I have witnessed this week, I am convinced that our support to the people of Ecuador will bolster their huge and impressive determination, and provide people with the necessary immediate assistance as well as the support required in the months ahead, as they seek to rebuild their lives and their communities. Today, and tonight, they need shelter, they need medical care and treatment and medicines, they need mosquito nets, they need water purification kits, and they need WASH items. As distressed women in long queues in Manta told me on Wednesday morning, having left their children out of what was left of their homes to guard against those occasional looters, the price of bottled drinking water and essential staple foods has quadrupled, making it unaffordable for so many. So drinking water and food is needed for families who have lost everything and to stabilise the supply of these staples of life.

This is what, and I do urge you, this is what your generous pledges of cash from your countries, on behalf of your peoples, will buy immediately through the coordinated programme of international support. I do urge you to be generous and to do so now.

Thank you.