Beat: Miscellaneous

Powerful quake off Guatemala kills 52, leaves others missing

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USPA News - More than 50 people were killed Wednesday and nearly two dozen remain missing after a powerful earthquake struck off the Pacific Coast of Guatemala, authorities said on Thursday. Some 250,000 people have been directly affected by the disaster.

The 7.4-magnitude earthquake at 10:35 a.m. local time (1635 GMT) on Wednesday was centered about 24 kilometers (14 miles) south of Champerico, a port in southwestern Guatemala which is close to the border with Mexico. It struck about 41.6 kilometers (25.9 miles) deep, making it a shallow earthquake, according to the United States Geological Survey (USGS). Felt as far away as Mexico City, estimates from USGS computer models shwoed some 2.1 million people near the epicenter may have experienced strong to very strong shaking which can result in moderate to heavy damage. Approximately 6.6 million people were estimated to have perceived moderate shaking while 12.2 million others could have felt light tremors. The National Coordinator for Disaster Reduction said the powerful earthquake damaged more than 2,260 residential buildings, of which more than 550 sustained severe or total damage. At least 52 people were confirmed to have been killed by late Thursday, including 40 in San Marcos Department, 11 in Quetzaltenango Department, and one in SololÃ¡ Department. Authorities fear the death toll could rise significantly as 22 people remained missing on Thursday, with little hope of finding survivors. Also on Thursday, Guatemalan President Otto Pérez Molina declared three days of national mourning due to the scale of the disaster. He said an estimated 6.6 million people are at risk from the effects of the powerful earthquake, which triggered landslides and destroyed roads in some regions. Although the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center initially cautioned about the small risk of a local tsunami, no tsunami warnings were issued. The center later said it recorded a small tsunami wave of 7 centimeters (2.7 inch) above normal sea levels near Acajutla in El Salvador, but no damage was reported. United Nations (UN) Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon expressed his condolences to the government and people of Guatemala and offered the organization`s assistance. "The United Nations stands ready to lend its assistance to efforts already under way by the Guatemalan authorities to respond to humanitarian needs created by the disaster and to mobilize any international support needed for that response," Ban`s spokesman said. Guatemala is on the so-called `Pacific Ring of Fire`, an arc of fault lines circling the Pacific Basin that is prone to frequent and large earthquakes. A series of light to moderate earthquakes struck southern Guatemala in September 2011, killing three people and injuring a 5-year-old child.

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