

PRESS RELEASE

Peru

Emotional stress and trauma of children affected by Peru's earthquake requires immediate support

Lima, August 21, 2007.- Thousands of children and young people left homeless and hungry in the aftermath of an earthquake that rocked Peru's southern coast and mountain regions are experiencing emotional stress and trauma. The United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF), as part of the United Nations effort to support victims of Peru's earthquake, is mobilizing to provide psychological counselling and support to these young victims.

"Many children show signs of stress after an earthquake such as the fear of not returning indoors or the inability to sleep," said Guido Cornale, UNICEF's representative in Peru. *"UNICEF is working with its UN colleagues and the Peru Government to ensure not only the fundamental needs of children and their families to food and shelter are met but their psychological needs are addressed early on too. We're working to see how best to support the thousands of children and young people traumatized by last week's powerful quake."*

Psycho-emotional counselling and support could take different forms. One is to meet groups of children and families and using play and recreation as a means to recover from emotional stress and trauma. Children and adolescents make up one third of the population in the affected region. A potential initiative promotes the participation of children and adolescents along with their families, government representatives and other community members in post-traumatic stress counselling which uses different toys and props to help young people express their emotions. UNICEF has adapted and used in many countries a psycho-emotional recovery approach to help young people and teenagers in the aftermath of natural disasters and man-made conflicts.

According to Peru's National Institute of Civil Defence (INDECI), the death toll continues to mount from the August 15 quake measuring 7.9 on the Richter scale: More than 500 people died, among them at least 40 children and young adults in the most-affected coastal regions, located about 200 kilometres south of Lima, the capital of Peru. Communications to the mountainous regions of the country affected has been difficult and the extent of damage and casualties is not yet known. In southern coastal areas, more than 1,000 were injured, 35,000 homes destroyed and important community infrastructure including hospitals, churches, schools and roads were either destroyed or damaged.

According to UNICEF's Health Officer Mario Tavera, who visited the region, children and young people require special attention. *"Children need their routines to feel secure and their routines have been badly disrupted. I've seen many schools damaged and destroyed so it doesn't appear that school will be able to restart before September. Children need to be provided with school supplies and the work must begin to provide them with emotional support to help them through this difficult period."*

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