

As Mexico earthquake survivors heal in hospitals, rescuers aren't giving up in the search for others

The search continues Sunday for victims buried under the rubble of an office building along Avenida Alvaro Obregon in Mexico City's Roma district. (Gary Coronado / Los Angeles Times)

Maria de Jesus, 35, has two legs in casts, deep scrapes on her arms and fresh stitches that run from the back of her head to just above her left eyebrow.

From her bed at Balbuena General Hospital, where she was airlifted after her neighbor's house crumbled during last week's earthquake in Mexico City and buried her in rubble, she explained that she was lucky.

"The good thing is it happened to me and not my daughter," she said Sunday. "But here I am, alive, thank God."

Five days after the magnitude 7.1 earthquake, some survivors were starting the long healing process in hospitals.

The nationwide death toll was at least 320 as of Sunday. In Mexico City, where at least 182 people were killed, rescuers continued to dig through the ruins of buildings, including at an office building in the Roma neighborhood and at a school where 21 children and four adults died in the southern part of the city.

Experts say the chances of finding survivors decline sharply three days after an earthquake, but rescuers and the Mexico City government have vowed to press on.

"The search and rescue of living people — that is what is important," Carlos Valdes, director of the National Center for Disaster Prevention, said Saturday.

Thirty-five people remain hospitalized in Mexico City, 11 in serious condition. At Balbuena, Dr. Fidel Castellanos said 60 patients had arrived since Tuesday and 11 remained. He said the hospital received more earthquake victims than any other facility.

Most still there had fractures. Two had burns. The victim with the most severe injuries, the doctor said, was a volunteer who was bringing aid from the state of Hidalgo to Morelos when she fell out of the truck bed she had been riding in. She remained in intensive care.



Susana Coronel Flores, whose nephew Adrian Moreno is missing in a collapsed building, sheds a tear as the search continues for victims buried under the rubble in Mexico City. (Gary Coronado / Los Angeles Times)

One of the burn patients was Manuel Hernandez, 38, who was helping neighbors shut off a damaged gas tank when it exploded, causing second-degree burns on his face and arms. He expects to be released by the end of next week.

At the Dalinde Medical Center in the city center, relatives said that Ernesto Sota Cisneros, 74, and his son Ernesto Sota Lopez, 45, were working at their accounting firm when the earthquake struck and that they saved themselves by huddling under a beam in the office.

When the building collapsed, they “had the great fortune” that one of the slabs that fell from the ceiling left a gap, letting air in, said a cousin, Maria Cisneros.

“When they tell us what happened, their eyes fill with tears,” she said. “They can’t believe they are alive. It’s really a miracle.”



Rescuers search for victims buried under the rubble along Avenida Alvaro Obregon in Mexico City's Roma neighborhood. (Gary Coronado / Los Angeles Times)

During a tour of the town of Jiquipilas in the southern state of Chiapas, President Enrique Peña Nieto urged people to be strong as they begin efforts to rebuild.

"United together in all of Mexico, we will face this task of reconstruction and see that things return to normal," he said.

Mexico City Mayor Miguel Angel Mancera said the city has received 11,200 requests for property inspections and has completed almost 70% of them. Almost 550 schools have been inspected, with 61 deemed safe to reopen.

Rescue efforts were briefly paused after an aftershock hit Saturday morning, with a magnitude of 6.1. It was centered about 325 miles southeast of Mexico City in the state of Oaxaca, the region that took the brunt of an earlier magnitude 8.1 quake Sept. 7.

Mancera told Mexican television Saturday that rescue attempts would continue, with crews concentrating on eight collapsed buildings around the capital in search of an estimated 30 people who could still be alive amid the rubble.

Also found alive was Lucas, a green and red parrot. Mexico City firefighters dug Lucas out from a pile of rubble in the Lindavista neighborhood north of the city

center Sunday as he squawked loudly. He was returned to his owner.

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