



Relief group aids Peru quake victims

by Seth Hemmelgarn

The magnitude 8 earthquake that hit part of Peru on August 15 might seem like a remote problem to people in the Bay Area, but the Rainbow World Fund is counting on donors, especially from the LGBT community, to help survivors.

"Giving even small amounts internationally can yield huge results," said Jeff Cotter, executive director of the group, an LGBT and friends-based humanitarian services agency. The agency's headquartered in the Castro.

So far, reports have at least 650 people known to have died in the South American country, and more bodies likely will be discovered as the rubble is cleared. At least 1,600 people have been injured and 100,000 people are homeless, many of them sleeping out in the cold, according to aid officials and news reports.

The port of Pisco, which is south of the Peruvian capital, Lima, was one of the hardest hit areas. Eighty percent of the buildings there were destroyed, according to Michael Altshuler, senior director of development for CARE, the international aid agency the Rainbow World Fund has partnered with for this effort.

Access to food, electricity, and medical treatment is limited. A lack of clean water could lead to the spread of water-borne illnesses.

Donations can be made through the group's Web site, <http://www.rainbowworldfund.org>. Money will also be collected at Cafe Flore Friday, August 24, starting at 5 p.m.

Cotter said the group hopes to raise \$10,000 initially, and all of the money will go directly to help buy things like basic medical supplies, tents, sleeping bags, plastic for shelters, and clean water tools.

Cotter said the earthquake, which was followed by several magnitude 6 aftershocks, presents "a major long-term humanitarian problem."

"For a lot of these people, it's going to take three to five years to come back to a state of self-sufficiency," he said. Roads, hospitals, schools, and shops have been destroyed. All of this will have "far-reaching" economic and

emotional impacts, Cotter said. Peru is one of the world's poorest countries. About half of the country's people live at or below the poverty line, according to the CIA World Factbook.

Although it's been just over a week since the earthquake struck, it's "already fallen off the radar," said Gary Virginia, volunteer events manager for Cafe Flore. Cotter said events like the 2004 tsunami that instantly killed hundreds of thousands of Asians and Hurricane Katrina, which killed more than 1,800 Americans in 2005, draw donations for long periods of time. He said that smaller-scale events like the earthquake in Peru need more coverage.

There's "not as much publicity," for Peru, Virginia said. "I don't think people realize how dire the situation is." But, he said, "we live on a fault line, so it just as easily could've been an 8-magnitude earthquake in the Bay Area."

Drawing attention to these issues can be difficult, but Cotter and Virginia both said the LGBT community can be relied on for its compassion.

The community's struggles with HIV/AIDS and civil rights issues have "taught us a lot about suffering and compassion," Cotter said. "I find people in our community are very aware of the needs of others and can also connect when other people are suffering."

"It's increasingly important to an organization like CARE to have reliable partners like the Rainbow World Fund" each time there's a disaster of this nature, CARE's Altshuler said.

For more information on the Cafe Flore event, call (415) 621-8579. The charitable groups Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence and Krewe de Kinque will co-sponsor the event. The evening also serves as the kick-off for the cafe's Tutti Fruti Fridays, which will feature Brazilian-themed entertainment. Cafe Flore is located at 2298 Market Street in San Francisco. There's no cover charge.

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