

Ministries Extend Relief Work to Chile

✖ Despite budgets already stretched by relief work in Haiti, Christian aid groups are mobilizing teams in Chile, which was rocked Saturday by one of the strongest recorded earthquakes.

Samaritan's Purse and World Vision were among the first to have workers on the ground in Chile, where a magnitude 8.8 earthquake has left at least 723 people dead and thousands displaced.

Photo: Convoy of Hope

Samaritan's Purse, led by Franklin Graham, sent truckloads of food, blankets and other relief supplies from offices in nearby Bolivia. Meanwhile, World Vision began distributing blankets and water containers to quake survivors in Santiago, the capitol of Chile, over the weekend.

Save the Children and Convoy of Hope were sending teams to assess the damage in Chile. Convoy of Hope workers planned to take 10 water systems with them that can provide more than 19,000 gallons of clean drinking water each day, said Kary Kingsland, the ministry's vice president of disaster response.

"There are still areas of Chile

where there is not a clear accounting for how many people have died or were injured,” Kingsland said. “The need is great and our teams will acquire resources in the country to help meet the needs of those effected by the earthquake.”

The earthquake struck near Chile’s second-largest city, Concepción, and has damaged more than 1 million homes. Santiago, located about 270 miles north of the epicenter, also was badly damaged.

Since Saturday, Chile has experienced more than 120 aftershocks of magnitude 5 or greater, according to the U.S. Geological Survey. Known to have a history of very large earthquakes, Chile has experienced 13 events of a magnitude 7 or greater since 1973.

World Vision, which has a warehouse in Santiago, plans to establish a second base in Concepción.

“We are extremely concerned about the emotional impact of so many aftershocks on children. Not only the physical needs, but the psychosocial needs of children in the quake zone will be a priority once the full extent of the needs are known and we can begin delivering much-needed supplies,” said Tatiana Benavides, World Vision’s national director in Chile.

On Tuesday World Vision, which has worked in Chile for 30 years, was still confirming the

safety of its 100
staff in the nation.

In the five communities just
outside Santiago, World Vision workers said many houses had
collapsed
completely, while others that were still standing were too
damaged for people
to inhabit. Children were fearful of closed-in areas, and
hundreds of families
were still sleeping on the streets, the ministry reported.

The president of the
Confessional Lutheran Church of Chile, which is affiliated
with the Luther
Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS) said local pastors and members
were safe. "By
God's grace [none] of our church members and pastors' families
have suffered,"
wrote the Rev. Carlos Schumann in an e-mail to LCMS leaders.

The
LCMS has given nearly \$4 million for relief work in Haiti,
where more than
230,000 people died after a magnitude 7 quake Jan. 12. But the
conservative
Lutheran denomination has pledged to also assist Chile quake
victims.

"While
already committing human and fiscal resources to relief and
rebuilding in
Haiti, we stand ready to be of assistance in any way possible
in the aftermath
of this very powerful earthquake in your country," LCMS
President Gerald B.
Kieschnick wrote in an e-mail to Schumann.

Though slow to ask for assistance, Chilean President Michelle Bachelet has said she would welcome international aid.

Argentina announced that it was sending a field hospital and water treatment materials, and the United Nations said Monday that it would rush supplies, the Los Angeles Times reported.

U.S. officials said Monday that Chile had made modest requests of the United States so far, asking for a field hospital, communications equipment and water filtration equipment.

During a visit to Chile Tuesday, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton took satellite phones and said the U.S. would send water purification systems and a mobile field hospital with surgical capability that is "ready to go," the Associated Press reported.

Clinton said the U.S. is "ready to help in any way" that Chile requests.