

Quake Aftermath: Demands for Prevention

Judith Harris (August 31, 2016)



To begin anew after an event as horrifying as the earthquake in hilly Central Italy takes courage. At least 300 lives were lost, and ongoing tremors continue to terrify survivors. For the future: prevention, prevention, prevention.

ROME -- It takes courage to begin anew after an event as horrifying as the earthquake in hilly Central Italy. At least 300 lives were lost (294 officially). As of Wednesday ongoing tremors reaching in some cases a magnitude of 4 rocked Norcia and Preci (Perugia), Castelsantangelo (Macerata), and Montemonaco and Montegallo (Ascoli Piceno), and continue to terrify the survivors. The watchword: never again, and we must build awareness of the need for prevention.



Prosecutors have opened formal investigations regarding collapsed buildings which had only recently been refurbished at public expense, but not rendered quake-proof. Among the outspoken critics of a lack of prevention is Giuseppe Zamberletti, the first head of the Department for Civil Protection when it was created 40 years ago. "Our political class does not come from Mars," he told a journalist from *La Repubblica*. "It reflects our country. Everybody is very active just now, but when the emotional moment is past, things come to a halt. What we need is to build awareness of these risks -- education in the schools, the creation of behavioral models."

Among the most severe critics is Gabriele Ponzoni of the National Council of Geologists and General Secretary of the European Federation of Geologists. : "An event like that of August 24 isn't supposed to cause victims: scientific and technical knowledge is now at a point that we can create buildings and structures capable of dynamically enduring these events. But this can only happen if you have a good knowledge of the underground of the area," Ponzoni said in Rome today. A correct knowledge of structures present in the ground is essential.

The potential for disaster differs "if the city is built upon soft or alluvial ground, or upon hard rock masses," said Ponzoni. Because Italy is highly vulnerable to earthquakes, a deep knowledge of the terrain is essential. For the future, a complete geological map should be created along with complete seismic micro-zoning studies. A dossier of buildings should be compiled, along with an analysis in its entirety of construction procedures.

Still, amid the bad news there is also good. An ABC TV journalist who has just returned from Amatrice, the town which was grievously flattened by the quake, told me that the Protezione Civile efforts have been far more orderly and the temporary tent towns better organized than in previous such occasions.

In addition, contributions for help for quake victims are arriving from all over Italy. On Sunday the Culture Ministry devoted the \$679,000 from sales of tickets to the 70,000 visitors to all Italian state museums to urgent action on heritage sites. "It was a wonderful day of solidarity," said Minister Dario Franceschini. "Many citizens chose going to a museum as a way to be together with the victims of the earthquake." In fact, museum attendance was far larger than a usual Sunday, he added.

Elsewhere cities and villages have organized benefits -- fund-raising eat-in's, literally -- in piazzas, where the popular pasta dish, spaghetti all'Amatriciana, was on sale. In our tiny town of Trevignano Romano, volunteer chefs cooked and dished out portions in a lakeside piazza for E. 5 each, as local entertainers performed. All profits went to the suffering towns only 90 minutes distant. Already the town, with a population of 6,000, had sent three truckloads of food and new clothing to the five quake-stricken towns.

In those towns the local population is doing its best to return to some form of ordinary life. At newly upgraded Protezione Civile offices, parents of six children arrived to volunteer an offer of hospitality to those left homeless. It also made headlines here that in several towns, cafes have been reopened, with tables and chairs set outdoors. Braving the risk of collapsing walls, the owners venture inside to prepare cups of coffee and cappuccinos, soft drinks and, for the children, snacks.

"At Arquata, you can come to the cafe, stop a bit to chat, drink an aperitif, and share your fears and hopes with your fellow villagers," journalist Michele Bocci reported. "The people talk about the stability of their houses and about the risk of looters -- though none has yet been seen." The owner of the cafe, Settimia, herself is now homeless, and she and her husband are sleeping in a caravan. "But we know that just being here in the daytime is important for our neighbors."



Needless to say, recriminations abound. At a funeral for victims the priest conducting the rites had the huge floral offerings sent by Italian state authorities removed from the coffins because they smacked of sponsorization. "The authorities should have devolved the money to reconstruction instead of on flowers," he said.

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