

Oct. 14

Santiago Atitlán - One week later:

(If you would prefer not to receive these disaster updates, just reply with unsubscribe in the subject box.)

This is an email report from Surunda Velasquez. Surunda singlehandedly has changed the lives of the community, creating hundreds of jobs for the T'zutuujil people and an outlet for their creativity. She is the person who originally brought beadwork to Santiago.

It is a week since the disaster. The amount of work going on with the relief efforts has been as relentless as the Hurricane a week ago was with the rain. It did rain, or should I say, pour constantly for a week.

By now, the aid has arrived from the outside. There were the 1st and second days when Santiago was on its own, and people were going out to bring in the dead in seemingly countless coffins of mostly kids, as the coffins were small with every now and then a long one that were the adults. The town square was packed. By then, we had set up a soup kitchen to cook for the bomberos and all the able young men with hoes who were bringing in the bodies. And as we were working in Argentina Sojuel's classroom on the square, we became a witness. It is part of tradition to witness the death and give dignity to the dead to identify it and put it to rest in the cemetery. And now several days later the land in Panabaj is called a "campo santo" an official cemetery as the people after digging for 6 days, are tired and the danger is high health wise to be out digging in the mud.

The first 2 days it was considerably dangerous to be digging in Panabaj because of the continued rain. The town of Panabaj is now off limits and condemned so there can be no return of the survivors.

The next days were filled with receiving the help of the neighboring towns. The solidarity of the people here is high and the outpouring of corn and food and people to help dig in the mud was overwhelming to see and experience. To be on the receiving end of this gives all of us feel quite human and extremely grateful. In the market, people gave or sold for a good price. The vegetables for the soup pot were cooking in the soup kitchen. The feeling of solidarity has been and still is very high.

The aid from the outside was jubilantly received. By then the survivors were told to register at the shelters called Albuergues. And most people have settled or registered in the shelters. It was determined that if one was not registered in these shelters one was not going to be eligible for aid. But as with all such plans, people do fall thru the cracks. There are so many families that took in extended families that survived the mud flow (there were technically 3 mud flows, one on either side of the town). Some households are housing as many as 50 people under one roof. There is a large task underway to locate and do a census of all these people that are desperate with hunger and have not received aid as of yet from the authorities. What aid that exists is still at the stage of being not quite enough. The clothing, for example are mostly clothing donated from the city population and from the outside in the first world. I, myself, have sorted the clothing that came my way and have a stack of clothing much to big to be of use for the small mayan physiques. There is also a standard of choice among the people here and the women need huipiles and cortes, not western pants, blouses, t-shirts and jeans. The men here just won't fit in the bigger sizes of clothes that have come in, not to mention all the smaller sizes of all the children and babies. And people need bedding. Hopefully, there will be enough to go around, but most of the neighbors know where the truly desperate people are and their goodwill makes it possible to find these marginalized families.

The Red Cross wants to help us. They are bringing in supplies to continue a soup kitchen as well as distribute food. For everyone here tortillas are the one basic food. 2 pounds per adult a day is the average consumption. Of course, ideally, there are beans and other proteins as well. When you have 23 people in your household that works out to 46 pounds of corn a day alone. Unfortunately, the corn that was still out in the fields and close to harvest was destroyed by the storm all over the country. A lot of the people in Panabaj had just harvested their half years supply of corn and ended up having to abandon it in the mud.

They say on the internet that 75%of the country's infrastructure has been destroyed. The roads are slowly getting cleared but there are a lot of bridges to

cross that have been rebuilt hastily. We are still in rainy season, but that is much less rainfall than when a category 1 hurricane comes thru like last week.

The hospitalito Atitlan, which reopened after 15 years of abandonment in April of this year and was progressing with a new operating theater, a new kitchen and medical storage building (which being on the mud flow side of the property actually served to save the hospital building), was halfway buried in mud. The mud did come in but it only filled part of the hall and the reception room. The 2 story stone house across the road was not so lucky and there is just no sign it ever existed but in one's memory. As of today, the decision to move the hospital has been made and there is movement of looking at serviceable place to rent in town. To look for a building that has 6 –7 rooms preferably on one floor is next to impossible and to have car accessibility a dream. The choices are few but something will get arranged.

Every day something is happening. One cannot help but be involved with the relief efforts. Today at Adisa – Amigos and padres of Descapacitados in Santiago Atilan, we combined the 3 groups of my beadshop where there are 12 families that are affected and the weaving cooperative Cajolya and Adisa to receive and distribute aid to the affected in all 3 groups that came in today. People from Quetzaltenango , Guatemala City and Antigua brought packages of corn, beans, noodle soup mixes, milk powder, soap, aqua pura and toilet paper.

From the 3rd day or so there has been a campaign to be using chlorine to purify the water and to wash hands before eating. The threat of hepatitis is high. Cholera can be around the corner if things get out of hand, hygiene wise. There is a campaign for everyone to take their tetanus shot. There are teams of doctors and nurses from the US and Cuba and Spain. Hopefully some water filtration systems will come so drinking water will not be a problem.

As the day ends, we are tired but do feel a bit more optimistic that some aid is helping people get thru this emergency tonight.

Written by Surunda Velasquez October 12, 2005

Check out our website www.puebloapueblo.org for further updates.

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Email dated 10/20 from Santiago from Karin B. who is a Swedish journalist. She has been very instrumental in resurrecting the hospitalito. Check out the website for more information.

Hola Ken,

Unfortunately Hepatitis A is on the loose. Between Oct. 7th and 18th, six cases were diagnosed.

The Hospitalito Atitlan, now temporary located in a house formerly known as the Bat House and the Bird House in Tzan Chi Cham, is open to see emergency patients around the clock. We hope to open for consultations Monday.

We have been given a 5,000 liter watertank, that the volunteer firemen of town (with help of a big red truck) will fill with water from a cleaner bay away from the mud slides and town center.

Three teams of health-care workers came to town last week-end. We sorely need them. I for one, have a hollow in my soul that needs to be filled, a torn-up soul that needs some mending, but where to you find the tools? Maybe Time will help us. 72 people have shown up at Centro de Salud with psychological traumas. Others, 192

patients, are diagnosed with “head-aches”.

Earlier today I talked to a young man who lost his home in Panabaj. He told me about how he found a man and a woman holding onto a baby and had helped dig them all out from the mud near his former home-stead.

And will we be able to return to Panabaj? We believe it will be a decision of the inhabitants of Panabaj. Are they willing to return to their lands, their homes, their memories of a mountain coming down in deadly speed, filling their homes with mud and taking away their loved ones, their homes, their lands, their clothes, pots and pans...

We have, however, written a letter to the director of Instituto Nacional de Sismología, Vulcanología, Meteorología e Hidrología, asking him and the agency, that has a reputation of professionals at work, to inspect the area. It is way premature to make the decision whether or not we will continue to rebuild in Panabaj or look for a new future home for the Hospitalito.

Saludos, Karin

Dear Friends of Santiago Atitlán, Guatemala,

I wanted to bring you up-to-date about how we are using your donation, to Pueblo a Pueblo Inc. We are working on several fronts:

Healthcare:

Needless to say K'aslimaal, the local governing body of the Hospitalito has been incredibly busy. The hospitalito in Panabaj remains unusable as it sits in an area that has been declared a mass grave. The first goal was to ensure that the town had uninterrupted 24/7 medical care. With incredible speed, K'aslimaal and the physicians opened up an interim hospitalito and began providing 24/7 medical services within two weeks of the disaster. I heard that it still takes 3 hours traveling through the mud, a few miles to get to the Panabaj facility to transport supplies and equipment back to the interim hospitalito in town. Water and electricity has been a problem but the volunteers, staff and doctors have prevailed. The first surgery has already been performed and the first baby delivered.

K'aslimaal made sure that the first-responders, the bomberos (fireman) were all vaccinated for Hepatitis B. Vaccinations flown down by Dr. Gil Mobley

were given out to the general public. Consideration was given to vaccinating all the children under 5 in town (4625) for Hepatitis B and A which would cost \$189,000, well beyond the scope of what K'aslimaal can do. Financial support and equipment is being supplied to the Puesto de Salud in Tzan Chaj, which is a clinic that has been established on the far side of Panabaj, where USAID is setting up temporary plastic tarp dwellings for the homeless. Some concern has been expressed as these dwellings are barely minimal and they will remove the homeless from site. The fear is that they will become permanent housing....but it appears that this is the best solution given the large number of homeless people and pressing need for housing. This area is too far away from town for people to be treated for routine medical problems, so K'aslimaal is supporting the doctors there and victims needing more than routine care are being referred to the hospitalito. In fact, all victims of the mudslides have been guaranteed free access to medical care at the hospitalito. Lastly, on the medical front, K'aslimaal is providing support to twelve mental health care workers who have been an incredible assistance to survivors and responders as well. K'aslimaal is housing and feeding eleven Cuban physicians who have been assigned to five schools in town where the survivors, who were scattered around town, have been temporarily moved. School vacation has begun and will last until February, freeing up these buildings for temporary housing. The Cuban doctors are providing routine care and monitoring for any disease outbreaks and referring patients for more intensive care at the hospitalito.

Food and clothing have poured into the community from several diverse relief agencies. Reports are that the situation has stabilized somewhat. At the same time as securing 24/7 medical capacity, K'aslimaal and Pueblo a Pueblo have reached out to address non-medical needs.

Housing:

Several T'zutujil hospitalito staff members lost everything in the mudslides and we are repairing/replacing homes for them and renting facilities for other staff members who were affected. A special thanks go to these staff members, who in the face of their own losses, continued to devote time to re-establish the interim hospitalito.

David Granville, at the Posada wrote Pueblo a Pueblo:

Today a young man named Cruz Chivileu Tzina came to ask for help. His story is one of the saddest I have ever heard in my life. His wife gave birth about ten minutes before the mudslide. He does not know if he had a boy or a girl. The mudslide took his house, his wife, newborn baby, son of ten, and the midwife. He escaped with his seven year old daughter. He was catatonic for several days.

He is a stone mason. His mother-in-law owns a small piece of property that can accommodate another house for him and his daughter.

While there are thousands of people in need of housing, we felt this case rose to the level of a leading and we must respond with a contribution to David to ensure that Cruz can build himself and his daughter a new home.

Elementary Schools: Tree of Life lost its school in Panabaj. La Escuela de Autogestion Comunitaria Pronade de Tzanchaj (335 students) sustained serious mudslide damage at. With our support Tree of Life will be repairing the school in Tzanchaj and assisting their Panabaj students with relocation and school supplies.

Traditional Clothing: Pueblo a Pueblo is supporting a huipile project that has been started by Susie Granville. As many of you know, indigenous women take great pride in their cultural traditions and as the Rigoberto Menchu Foundation has pointed out, this catastrophe has the capacity to degrade these cultural traditions as people with no resources abandon often expensive handmade clothing for "Ropa Americana". Under the brilliant and sensitive leadership of Susie of the Posada, this all-volunteer project is distributing looms, equipment and threads to T'zutujil women who have lost everything so they can weave and embroider traditional clothing for themselves.

Pueblo a Pueblo is also supporting the Cajolya Association of Maya Women Weavers. This is a non-profit organization of indigenous women who are preserving the traditions of backstrap weaving while supporting their families. Several of these women lost their families and homes during the disaster. Our support will help them build homes, replace weaving equipment and supplies so these women can hold onto their cultural values and quickly return to earning a living.

Handicapped Children:

We are supporting ADISA, a non-profit organization in Santiago that cares for disabled children. Their modest resources were exhausted during this crisis. We are further working on obtaining anti-convulsive medications for their children, as their supply has run out.

Recovery from this disaster is a long-term effort, with reports of 3000-3500 people being temporarily housed in the schools. The major issues of housing and gainful employment will continue for some time. Our overall strategy is to continue to maintain a 24/7 medical facility and to meet niche needs that the larger relief organizations cannot address as they institute structural programming such as mass relocation, construction of temporary housing, potable water, etc. While the decisions about the priorities are always difficult with limited resources in the face of such overwhelming need, we at Pueblo feel comfortable that our partners on site are addressing specific needs which will sustain the victims and help weave them back into

the life of the community. We take stewardship of your gifts very seriously and are investing these contributions with oversight and documentation.

Many thanks have poured in from the above organizations and individuals. These thanks belong to each of you, the donors, large and small. In the same way, many of you have written, thanking Pueblo a Pueblo for doing this volunteer work. These thanks belong to the people on the ground, in Santiago, who have sustained such losses and are pulling together to help their neighbors.

Over 500 people have donated to this effort and we have raised and are disbursing over \$100,000 to Santiago. We very much appreciate your continued support. Besides receiving tax-deductible gifts, Pueblo a Pueblo, Inc has also registered with www.igive.com This is an on-line Shopping Mall. You'll find more than 500 stores at the Mall, like Barnes & Noble, JC Penney, Land's End, Expedia, Dell, and the Wall Street Journal. You can purchase a host of services and goods including: computer supplies, travel, hotel accommodations, clothing, toys, flowers and gifts of all kinds. Every purchase you make through www.igive.com helps Pueblo a Pueblo - Guatemala Disaster Relief.

As the Holiday season begins, please consider supporting the T'zutujil people, with a gift in honor of a friend or relative. Widen our circle of support by informing others of this opportunity. Thank you again for your support.

Sincerely,

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"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed it's the only thing that ever has." Margaret Mead