



Chile quake was 5th strongest since 1900

Published: Feb. 28, 2010 at 6:49 PM

SANTIAGO, Chile, Feb. 28 (UPI) -- The 8.8-magnitude earthquake that struck Chile Saturday was the fifth-strongest in the world since 1900, geologists said.

The strongest quake recorded since 1900 also occurred in Chile -- a 9.5-magnitude quake that struck near Concepcion in 1960, killing more than 2,000 people and leaving more than 2 million homeless, The New York Times reported Sunday. Following a 7.8-magnitude quake in Valparaiso in 1985, officials imposed strict building codes and one result is that the death toll and extent of damage from Saturday's quake are likely to be much less than what Haiti suffered from a 7-magnitude quake Jan. 12, Andre Filiatrault, the director of the Multidisciplinary Center for Earthquake Engineering Research at the University at Buffalo, said.

Bachelet Sunday declared a "state of catastrophe" and said Saturday's quake was "one of the worst tragedies in the last 50 years" in Chile.

Paul E. Simons, the U.S. ambassador to Chile, told the Times in a telephone interview from Santiago the United States has offered aid but Chilean authorities had yet to request help. The International Federation of Red Crosses and Red Crescents said the Chilean Red Cross had not indicated a need for outside help, the Times said.

Santiago was reported calm Sunday but in Talca, 167 south of the capital, there were reports people slept outdoors, keeping warm with fires made using wood from destroyed buildings. In Chillan, 69 miles from Concepcion, 300 prisoners escaped through a crumbled prison wall and started a riot, the Chilean newspaper La Tercera reported. More than 200 of the escaped convicts were still at large Sunday afternoon, the report said.

Operations were halted at major seaports and airports.

© 2010 United Press International, Inc. All Rights Reserved.