

## CHILE

### The Earthquake of February 2010

The major earthquake of 8.8 magnitude – the world’s fifth most powerful since 1900 – that shook Chile on 27 February 2010 and the subsequent tsunami not only destroyed thousands of homes; it also caused severe damage to historic monuments, museums, theatres, churches, parks and heritage zones. Initial assessments carried out by the National Monuments Council (NMC) include 241 damaged sites and 30 heritage zones, among them San Salvador Basilica and San Francisco church in the capital of Santiago, national monuments like the church in the village of Guacarhue (O’Higgins region), the Hacienda San José del Carmen de El Huíque, the historic centres of cities like Rancagua, Talca, Curico, Linares and Concepcion, and parts of the heritage zones of Chanco, Lolol and Coquecura in the regions of O’Higgins and El Maule. All the damaged monuments are adobe buildings, and according to Oscar Acuña, executive secretary of NMC, the impact of the quake is “a call to search for techniques to do a better job in reinforcing churches”, one example being the recently restored San Francisco church in Santiago which suffered some damage (reported by Daniela Estrada, IPS March 23). The earthquake had the most serious impact on religious sites, as nearly three out of four heritage buildings damaged belonged to the Roman Catholic Church.

Preliminary information has also been received on the state of the World Heritage sites. Fortunately, according to the National Copper Corporation, Sewell Mining Town, inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2006, did not suffer any major damage. In the historic quarter of the seaport city of Valparaíso, since 2003 on the World Heritage List, an earthquake of magnitude 6 was recorded, but no building at the site totally collapsed. However, two buildings show significant structural damage – La Matriz church and the Port market place. All buildings at the site have several minor damages on the facades, consisting mainly of the detachment of decorative elements. No damage of the funiculars has been reported, with the exception of the San Agustín funicular, whose condition was already precarious before the earthquake. The Chilean government has expressed the need to elaborate an integral recovery project.

According to the National Forest Corporation, the Juan Fernández Archipelago National Park, submitted to the Tentative List in 1994, did not suffer any damage, even though Juan Bautista Village on Juan Fernández Island was devastated by the tsunami. All the protected areas between O’Higgins and the Araucanía have been closed to the public until further notice.

The most extensive damage, however, occurred in the south-central regions of Maule, O’Higgins and Biobío, where many adobe homes were destroyed. To prevent demolition crews from erasing the remains of these culturally important sites that are part of Chile’s vernacular heritage, special efforts have been made by the NMC. According to Oscar Acuña, it is necessary to create incentives for owners of cultural patrimony to preserve buildings, because they receive no economic support for conservation. One source of funding is the State, but Acuña expects business interests to play a key role in restoring Chile’s historic sites (cf. Aaron Nelson, *The Christian Science Monitor*, March 31, 2010).





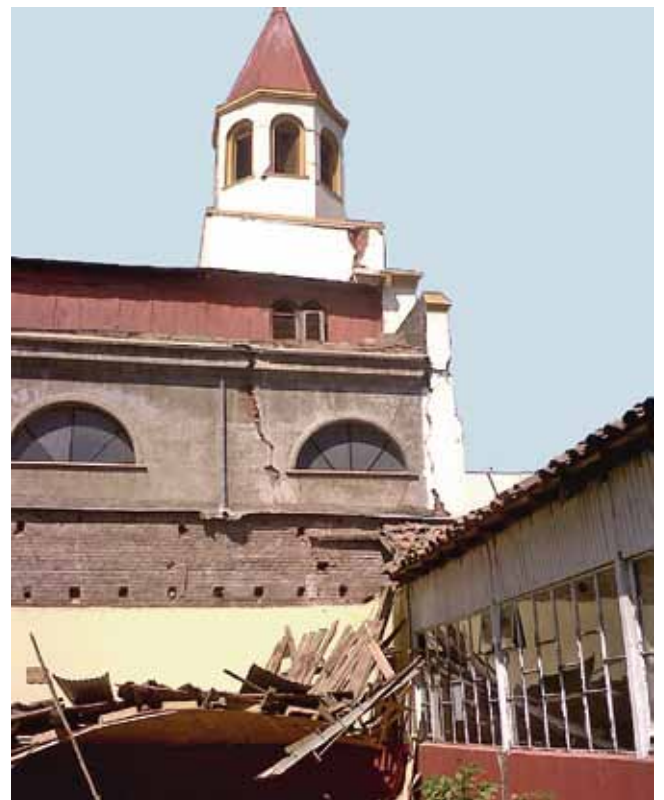


Vichuquen, Region del Maule



Coquecura, Region Biobio

Villa Alegre, Region del Maule, La Merced Church







Villa Alegre, Region del Maule, La Merced Church



Nirivilo, Region del Maule, damaged church

Corazon de Maria, damaged church

