

# Enjoy the camping and take a trip to the beach, Berlusconi tells shocked quake survivors

More than 10,000 Italians are left homeless

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L'Aquila

Silvio Berlusconi has told survivors of the Italian earthquake to lift their spirits by heading for the beach. He added that people forced from their wrecked homes should look on their tented accommodation as a spot of camping.

The Italian Prime Minister's comments have enraged some of those living in tent villages, after a second fitful night that was rocked by aftershocks from the 6.3-magnitude earthquake, Italy's worst for 30 years. The death toll rose to 250 yesterday.

Earlier there had been widespread praise for the emergency housing operation, mounted by the Civil Protection Department and the Red Cross with the aid of volunteers and charities, and Mr Berlusconi won plaudits for cancelling a trip to Russia and spending every day since Monday in the stricken region, encouraging and commending the rescue workers and vowing that "no one will be left alone".

Mr Berlusconi insisted that his remarks had been misunderstood and that he was simply trying to encour-

children could use a smile, a little bit of optimism and playfulness."

Mr Berlusconi said that he did not want "an atmosphere of pessimism, negativity, disease and death" where survivors were being sheltered. As many as 10,000 of the 17,000 people made homeless by the earthquake have taken his advice and left for the Adriatic resorts or elsewhere. But some of those left in the tent camps were appalled by his remarks.

"If Berlusconi thinks we are all on a camping holiday, I invite him to do a swap," said Vincenzo Breglia, as he stood outside his tent on a sports field on the outskirts of L'Aquila. "He can come here to sleep and I will be prime minister. Let's see how he likes spending the night in freezing temperatures with no hot water."

Mr Breglia's wife was also offended. "We may look as if we have made ourselves at home," she said, as she kept her 12-month-old daughter amused with two budgies in a cage left by neighbours who had fled to Rome. "And some things are well organised — there is even a vet in the camp for those who brought pet animals with them. But if this is a camping holiday, it is an enforced one. We left home with the clothes we had to hand, and have not been allowed to go back to get our belongings because the house is in a dangerous state. I suspect this will go on for months and months. How are we supposed to cope?"

Giancarlo Fischione, a Ministry of Finance employee with a wife and three children, said that he did not even have a tent. "We have all been sleeping in the family cars since Monday," he said bitterly. "There just aren't enough tents and containers." Mr Berlusconi's remarks had left him speechless, he said.

At the Aquila San Salvatore regional hospital, where a field hospital has been erected to deal with the victims, questions are being asked about why a recently built hospital in an earthquake-prone zone was unable to withstand the tremors. The A&E department was abandoned yesterday. Beds on wheels lay empty. Blankets and used rubber gloves were strewn across the floor, which was stained with blood and iodine, spilled as staff rushed to move patients out when the shocks rattled the supposedly quake-proof building.

One nurse, who was working at the field hospital, set up as an emergency alternative beside the car park, said that the scenario was scandalous. "We expect a modern hospital in an area like this to be one of the secure places," she said. "I was working the night it happened and couldn't believe it. Suddenly, bits of concrete started falling down, and the walls shook. We were open-mouthed. We thought it was an anti-seismic building."

As she spoke, medics dragged bags full of drugs to the tents, while the army and the Red Cross transported in-patients to hospitals elsewhere.

The Pope said at his weekly public audience that the relief operations were an example of how solidarity could help to overcome "even the most painful trials". Addressing the survivors, he said: "As soon as possible I hope to visit you." Father Federico Lombardi, a Vatican spokesman, said the visit would not be until after the Easter holiday because the Pope did not want to

interfere with relief operations. The first funerals were held yesterday and mass funerals are planned for tomorrow.

Rescue attempts continue, page 36  
Watch footage of the rescue  
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Survivors in the camps are struggling with the cold and lack of running water



A church being inspected. Four have been damaged very badly

age optimism. "Go by the seaside. It is only an hour away from here by bus and there are plenty of hotels at your disposal that are paid for by the State," he said during his daily visit to the quake zone in Abruzzo.

The people living tent cities "have everything they need, they have medical care, hot food. Of course, their current lodgings are a bit temporary. But they should see it like a weekend of camping," he said, according to the German N-TV channel. He told one homeless woman to put on sunscreen, drawing cheers from onlookers.

Mr Berlusconi — who lives in Palazzo Chigi, the Prime Minister's residence, rents a frescoed Renaissance palace in Rome and owns a mansion in Milan and villas in Sardinia and Bermuda — insisted that there was nothing inappropriate in his remarks.

"I don't think it's out of place," the Prime Minister told reporters. "I think

