

“THE EMERGENCY IS NOT OVER; IT HAS ENTERED A NEW PHASE.”

Interview with Fr. Txuo Rodríguez Villarroel, S.J.

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1. One month after the earthquakes, how would you describe the current situation in the hardest-hit communities? What has changed since the first few weeks?

One month after the earthquakes, the situation remains very complex and deeply unequal. In some areas of Caracas, such as Los Palos Grandes, Altamira, and Chacao, it has been possible to stabilize emergency response efforts and partially restore daily life. At first glance, it might seem that life is returning to normal. However, when we visit these communities and talk to people, we discover a much more painful reality: there are hundreds of damaged buildings and numerous families who have still not been able to return to their homes.

Therefore, behind this apparent normality, we must ask ourselves where these people are living, what conditions they face, and what their prospects are for the coming months. The stabilization of the environment does not mean that the families' situation has been resolved. Many remain displaced, staying with relatives, in temporary shelters, or searching for alternative housing.

In La Guaira, which we consider one of the main “ground zero” areas of the emergency, the situation remains particularly critical. Work continues to clear debris and recover the bodies of the deceased. Access difficulties persist, as do severe damage to homes and infrastructure, disruptions to basic services, and the presence of families who are displaced or living in very precarious conditions.

Today I must say this with the utmost responsibility: the emergency is not over; it has entered a new phase.

During the first few days, the response focused on searching for survivors, rescuing people from the rubble, treating the injured, and providing immediate assistance to affected families. Today, the focus of our efforts is on the affected families: people who have lost their homes, communities remaining in temporary shelters, and households that need to rebuild not only their homes but also their living conditions, their community ties, and their hope.

From day one, the Society of Jesus has stood alongside the affected communities. Through our two humanitarian aid collection and distribution centers, we have worked to alleviate suffering, address the most urgent needs, and provide close and responsible support to those who need it most.

However, our response is not limited to immediate relief. While we continue to provide food, safe water, medicine, hygiene supplies, protection, and psychosocial support, we are developing a joint Action Plan that brings together the capabilities of all the apostolic works and platforms of the Society of Jesus.

This plan will allow us to move from an urgent humanitarian response toward a comprehensive strategy for early recovery, recovery, and reconstruction. We seek to pool our capabilities, avoid isolated efforts, and ensure a coordinated, sustained, and effective presence alongside the affected communities.

The goal is to respond to today's urgency without losing sight of tomorrow: to address humanitarian needs effectively while simultaneously building a sustainable path that enables families to recover their homes, livelihoods, communities, and hope. We want to be present not only during the emergency but also throughout the long and demanding process of getting back on their feet, rebuilding, and starting over.

This new phase is particularly delicate because needs become less visible, more profound, and more prolonged. After the initial impact, the suffering does not disappear; it often becomes more silent. That is why it is essential to maintain a close, coordinated, and responsible presence, especially alongside children, older adults, people who are sick or have disabilities, and families who have lost everything.

2. What are the most urgent needs today? Are they the same as at the beginning, or have they evolved?

The needs that are beginning to emerge are numerous, diverse, and long-term. No single institution can address all of them on its own. That is why, as the Society of Jesus, we want to act responsibly, focusing our efforts on those areas where our ministries, capabilities, experience, and local presence can provide real value—always in coordination with communities, public institutions, and other humanitarian organizations.

Among the needs that are most pressing today are the structural assessment and rehabilitation of homes; the search for temporary and permanent housing solutions; the restoration of basic services and community spaces; the continuity of education for children and adolescents; mental health care and grief support; the restoration of livelihoods; the protection and organization of families remaining in shelters; access to clear information on risks, aid, and possibilities for return; and the dignified handling of the deceased, along with close support for their families.

Faced with this reality, the Society of Jesus does not aim to address everything, but rather to discern where our mission and our capabilities can offer the most relevant, effective, and sustainable contribution. We will especially support those processes in which we have

experience, apostolic networks, a community presence, and real opportunities for intervention.

We also understand that the response cannot be limited to the distribution of food or supplies. Our mission is to accompany people holistically: to address their material needs, protect their dignity, listen to their pain, strengthen community capacities, and contribute to recovery and reconstruction processes that enable families to get back on their feet, regain their autonomy, and rebuild their hope.

This transition also requires us to acknowledge that the Society of Jesus has not remained untouched by the effects of the earthquake. Our infrastructure, our work teams, and our institutional capacities have also been affected. There are people working in our ministries who have lost their homes, families connected to our mission who have lost loved ones, and collaborators who are experiencing the emotional and psychological consequences of this tragedy.

Therefore, in addition to supporting the affected communities, we must internally care for and rebuild our own teams. We need to provide human and psychosocial support, address the most vulnerable situations, reorganize responsibilities, and restore the conditions necessary for our institutions to continue providing their services.

Various educational centers and institutional facilities of the Society of Jesus have sustained damage that must be assessed and repaired, including 25 Fe y Alegría centers, the Colegio San Ignacio, the Jesús Obrero Educational Complex, some facilities at the Andrés Bello Catholic University, and several Jesuit communities. Although the extent of the damage varies, these interventions are essential to fully restore our capacity to provide support and service.

One of our priorities is to mobilize the necessary resources so that, in September, children, adolescents, and young people can return to class in dignified and safe environments. Rehabilitating educational centers does not simply mean repairing buildings; it means restoring places of learning, protection, nourishment, community, emotional support, and hope for students, their families, and their communities.

We therefore face a dual challenge: to continue responding to the urgent needs of the population while, at the same time, caring for those who sustain this response on a daily basis. To protect and support the most vulnerable, we must also strengthen our teams, restore our infrastructure, and reestablish our institutional capacities.

This new phase will require time, resources, technical support, coordination among different stakeholders, and a sustained commitment from the national and international community. Only in this way can we continue to stand alongside affected families and sustain, with responsibility and empathy, the long process of recovery and reconstruction.

3. What are you asking of the authorities and the international community in the coming weeks and months?

After a month, what I can share is a perspective from those of us on the front lines of the response—and we will remain alongside the communities even as public attention wanes.

First, we ask the authorities to strengthen coordination among all stakeholders on the ground: government institutions, international humanitarian organizations, the Catholic Church, civil society organizations, communities, and technical teams. The logistical efforts carried out during the first few weeks have been indispensable and have made it possible to maintain access corridors and respond to urgent needs. Now we need to move toward more stable coordination, with clear technical protocols, shared information, and transparent prioritization criteria, so that assistance reaches communities equitably and in a timely manner—not only the most visible or best-connected communities, but also the most isolated and vulnerable ones.

Second, we ask that it be understood that this is not a 30-day emergency. Even before the earthquake, the country was already facing profound social, economic, and humanitarian vulnerabilities: a deteriorating health system, weakened basic services, and millions of children and families living in vulnerable conditions. The earthquake did not create these difficulties, but it made them more evident, deepened them, and multiplied their consequences.

For this reason, we are deeply grateful for the emergency aid, which has saved lives and alleviated the suffering of many families, but we request a sustained and predictable financial commitment for early recovery, rehabilitation, and reconstruction. This process will not take weeks or months; it will require years of support, investment, technical capacity, and continuity.

Third, we call on the international community to ensure that this emergency is not overlooked. It is true that, as the weeks have passed, the earthquake has ceased to be trending news and has faded from social media and the media. However, the emergency remains a concrete, daily reality for families who have lost their homes, their livelihoods, or their loved ones.

We ask that the situation of the affected communities remain on the agendas of governments, cooperation agencies, and international organizations. When the cameras are turned off and media attention wanes, the needs will still be present. A loss of visibility must not lead to a loss of solidarity, funding, or political commitment.

Fourth, we ask that international cooperation recognize, listen to, and strengthen the local organizations that have been working in these areas for years. During major emergencies, international organizations arrive with invaluable capabilities, knowledge, and resources;

their presence is necessary, and we appreciate it. However, over time, many of them conclude their operations and withdraw.

Church organizations, civil society groups, and community-based organizations—which were active in the region before the earthquake, are responding during the emergency, and will remain present once international attention wanes—continue to work on the ground. We remain not merely out of institutional responsibility, but because this is our mission, our choice, and our commitment to the people.

For this reason, the international response must complement and strengthen local capacities, not replace them or create parallel structures. It is essential to establish partnerships with organizations that know the area, have the trust of the communities, and can guarantee long-term support, follow-up, and accountability. Investing in local capacities is also a way to ensure that the results of cooperation are more relevant, sustainable, and enduring.

As a priest, as a professional in international cooperation, and as the coordinator of the Society of Jesus' response, I insist that we must build a joint effort centered on the dignity of those affected. This requires ensuring accurate information, clear channels so that families can follow up on their cases, protection mechanisms, and genuine opportunities for community participation in decisions related to their care, relocation, recovery, and reconstruction.

Our commitment is to remain alongside the people beyond the initial emergency and spontaneous donations. We want to accompany communities not only so they can survive the emergency, but so they can reclaim their rights, their capabilities, their life plans, and their hope.

4. What has been the Society of Jesus' response to the emergency?

Since the earthquakes of June 24, 2026, the Society of Jesus in Venezuela has mobilized a humanitarian, technical, institutional, and pastoral response under a common guiding principle: "The Mission is Venezuela – Emergency 2026." One mission, one response.

Our priority has been to place the affected individuals, families, and communities at the center, coordinating the capabilities of the various Jesuit works, technical teams, volunteers, and national and international partners. The emergency has not been addressed as a series of isolated initiatives, but rather through a common coordination structure, with shared criteria, defined responsibilities, and mechanisms for monitoring and accountability.

Each institution has contributed based on its own experience. Fe y Alegría, through its educational and community presence; the parishes, by facilitating access to communities

and providing pastoral support; Andrés Bello Catholic University, with its logistical, technical, legal, and psychosocial capabilities; the Gumilla Center, through social analysis and community support; and the Jesuit Refugee Service, with its expertise in protecting and assisting displaced persons and those in particularly vulnerable situations.

The San Ignacio School has also become a vital hub for receiving, sorting, and distributing national and international aid, thanks to the work of hundreds of volunteers, institutional staff, and partner organizations.

One of the main components of the response has been the activation of collection centers at UCAB, CERPE, and San Ignacio School. These centers have received and distributed food, water, medications, medical equipment and supplies, hygiene products, mattresses, clothing, household goods, and materials for shelters, rescue operations, and debris removal.

Consolidated figures to date indicate that more than 50,000 people have received some form of assistance or humanitarian aid, either directly or through more than 100 organizations, parishes, institutions, and community networks to which supplies have been delivered. This is still a preliminary figure, as the San Ignacio School Collection Center remains active and new requests are received, assessed, and addressed daily.

Between June 27 and July 3, the UCAB Collection Center processed 444 requests, mobilized more than 500 volunteers, and distributed approximately 39,089 units of supplies, equivalent to about 161.9 metric tons. A total of 229 shipments were made to more than 130 destinations in La Guaira, Caracas, Miranda, and Aragua. During that period, approximately 10,800 people were directly assisted. Furthermore, coordination with specialized organizations made it possible to prepare more than 1,200 meals daily during periods of peak demand.

In La Guaira, coordination with Caritas and the diocese facilitated the distribution of aid through a network of 25 parish centers, making it possible to reach communities facing greater access challenges.

For its part, the San Ignacio School Collection Center has received and processed more than 1,200 requests for aid, distributed more than 7,000 metric tons of supplies, and served dozens of parishes, social organizations, health centers, communities, and institutions. From this center, food, water, medications, and hospital supplies, hygiene items, and equipment for rescue and emergency response have been distributed.

To ensure transparency and traceability, a digital platform was also developed to connect community needs with donations, inventory, and shipping orders. No supplies leave the center without a previously validated request, a documented record, and a delivery receipt. The system makes it possible to track what was received, where it came from, to whom it was delivered, and what its humanitarian purpose was.

The Society of Jesus' response does not end at the collection centers. While immediate relief efforts continue, we are already working on early recovery and reconstruction: educational continuity, infrastructure rehabilitation, psychosocial support, protection of the most vulnerable, and restoration of livelihoods.

Our task is to stand by the communities, not only during the most visible days of the emergency, but throughout the entire recovery process. That is our mission: to accompany, serve, coordinate resources, and help those affected rebuild their lives with dignity and hope.

5. Looking Ahead: What Are the Priorities for the Coming Months, and When Will Recovery Begin?

The transition from emergency to recovery and reconstruction will not occur abruptly or on a single date. In some communities, it will still be necessary to maintain immediate humanitarian assistance, while in others, early recovery efforts can already begin. Therefore, over the coming months, the different phases of the response will coexist, in accordance with the needs, damage, and capacities of each region.

To guide this process, the Society of Jesus in Venezuela is developing a Unified Response, Recovery, and Reconstruction Plan, which brings together its works, institutions, and apostolic networks under a common guiding principle: One mission, one response.

This plan does not mean that all institutions must carry out the same activities. It means that Fe y Alegría, UCAB, the Jesuit Refugee Service, the Gumilla Center, parishes, schools, social service organizations, and other institutions will work within the same strategic framework, with shared priorities, common intervention criteria, coordinated budgets, and mechanisms for coordination, monitoring, and accountability.

Each organization will contribute based on its experience, capabilities, and local presence. The goal is to avoid duplication of efforts, make better use of available resources, and ensure that aid reaches the people and communities facing the highest levels of vulnerability in a timely manner.

The Unified Plan will therefore serve as the common roadmap for moving from immediate relief toward recovery and reconstruction. It will be organized into six lines of action:

1. **Emergency aid:** ensuring food, water, medicine, hygiene supplies, and other essential goods for the most vulnerable families, as well as assessing the safety of affected infrastructure.
2. **Education in emergencies:** ensuring educational continuity, restoring classrooms and water and sanitation services, preventing school dropouts, and providing social-emotional support to students, teachers, and families.

3. **Protection and rights:** supporting children, adolescents, displaced persons, and vulnerable families in restoring their rights, accessing documentation, and preventing abuse, violence, exploitation, and human trafficking.
4. **Physical and emotional health:** Providing medical care, preventive guidance, psychosocial support, grief counseling, and strengthening community care networks.
5. **Livelihoods and Economic Revitalization:** Support the recovery of jobs, entrepreneurship, and productive activities through training, tools, technical assistance, and seed capital.
6. **Institutional strengthening:** improving the capacity of relief efforts to respond in a coordinated, safe, and transparent manner; institutionalizing emergency protocols; and safeguarding the physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being of workers and volunteers.

The priority for the coming months will be to address needs that remain urgent, while simultaneously creating the conditions for communities to gradually regain their autonomy. The response cannot be limited to the delivery of aid. It must help people reclaim their rights, their capabilities, their livelihoods, and their plans for the future, while also strengthening the social and community fabric affected by the earthquake.

6. Why is it essential for donors to continue supporting the response, and what message would you like to convey to friends and donors in the United States who have supported the campaign during this first month?

During this first month, our priority has been to alleviate the suffering of those affected: delivering food, water, medicine, shelter, and a supportive presence in the midst of their pain. We have come this far thanks to you and to thousands of people in various parts of the world who responded to the call of the Society of Jesus in Venezuela. Every contribution has turned into concrete aid, comfort, and hope for families who have lost almost everything.

Now a longer and more demanding phase begins. Through our ministries, we will contribute who we are, what we know how to do, and our ongoing presence in these areas to support recovery and reconstruction: education, protection, physical and emotional health, livelihoods, and community building. Inspired by Ignatian spirituality, we want to remain where life has been most deeply wounded, recognizing God in the faces of those who suffer. That is why we ask you to continue walking with us: your donation not only responds to an emergency but also helps rebuild lives, communities, and the future.

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