

Guayaquil runs out of coffins as COVID-19 deaths soar



Quito, April 7 (RHC)-- Guayaquil -- Ecuador's second-largest city -- has run out of wooden coffins due to the high rise of deaths mainly caused by the coronavirus pandemic. Authorities have announced that they will be delivering cardboard caskets in order to meet the increasing demand.

Around 2,000 cardboard boxes will be delivered by local providers to the city's authorities, which comes as the coastal city of more than two million people has become a regional hotspot of the virus with over 2,500 cases from the total 3,700 reported as of Monday in Ecuador. This has resulted in a spike in prices ranging from \$400 to over \$1,500 USD for a simple wooden coffin.

A Twitter user described her ordeal as her father was admitted on March 27th with respiratory problems, by April 3rd he had died from the virus. "That's when my nightmare began," Sofia writes. She explains that after the hospital misplaced her father's body and various bureaucratic processes two days later, she finally could register his death.

"I went to most of the city's funeral homes and coffins were sold out. They wanted to sell one for \$1,300 plus \$300 more to do the paperwork I just had done for free." But it wasn't until later in the week that she finally found her father's decomposed body to finally bury him.

Cases such as this recently made international headlines for the same reason as dozens of images of dead bodies left in the streets showed the grim reality of the port city's poorest. The province's Prefect Carlos Luis Morales told CNN Español that officials had been instructed not to divulge statistics about the death toll in Guayas. "Just to give you an idea, 480 death certificates have been issued since yesterday; 150 bodies are being collected each day."

Even Ecuador's President Lenin Moreno announced they are planning a "special" burial ground to bury the 3,500 he fears could die in the pandemic. The city is just now getting refrigerated trailers to help store the dead currently overwhelming city hospitals.

"It looks like a war zone hospital. The things we have seen are straight out of a horror film," a doctor at the Teodoro Maldonado Carbo hospital, one of the city's biggest facilities, told the Guardian. "My wife doesn't want me to go to work. But if I don't, even more patients will die."

Meanwhile, the official figures continue to register 191 deaths as of Monday, yet the images and testimonies make many question this count.

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