

# *Ecuador Appeals to Tourists to Return as Quake Hits Economy*

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Quito, August 9 (RHC)-- Almost four months after a devastating earthquake hit Ecuador, a leading government minister has appealed to tourists to return to the small Andean country.

Nearly 700 people were killed and about 6,200 injured on April 16th in the strongest earthquake to hit Ecuador in almost four decades, leaving about 8,650 people living in government shelters, according to government figures.

Maria Duarte, Ecuador's Minister of Urban Development and Housing, said she was "totally" optimistic about the pace of reconstruction with the repair or rebuilding of 26,000 homes in the works or planned. Longer term she said the government had to improve the construction of buildings in Ecuador which is prone to earthquakes.

She appealed to tourists to return to Ecuador to help put the country back on track. "We have several types of victims, not all are victims due to the destruction of their homes," she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation in a interview during a visit to New York City. She said: "There are people who remain without jobs and whose only form of sustenance was tourism, which momentarily is nonexistent."

The strongest quake in Ecuador since 1979 has tested the country's resilience at a time of economic difficulties due to low oil prices in this small member of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting

Countries (OPEC).

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