

# Housing Demand on the Rise in Mexico City

A quarter of a million people were left homeless by the 1985 earthquakes

Mexico City houses 23% of the nation's population which totals almost 82 million. Of the 18 million people living in the capital's metropolitan area, 10.8 million live in the Federal District alone. The remaining 40% of the metropolis' population lives in the adjacent municipalities of the State of Mexico. These rapidly growing municipalities—their population grew by 8.6 percent each year during the 1970's—present the greatest demands for housing in the nation.

Nearly a quarter of a million people were left homeless in Mexico City's downtown districts following the September 1985 earthquake. Some 56,000 homes were damaged or destroyed and had to be evacuated. The earthquake devastated both modern high-rise apartment buildings, such as *Tlatelolco*

and the so-called *Multi-familiares Juárez*, as well as older constructions built around the turn of the century, such as the famous "*Casa Blanca*" in Tepito. This building housed more than 150 families and was the setting for Oscar Lewis' novel *The Children of Sanchez*. It has now been demolished. The Colonia Roma, basically a middle class residential area, was evacuated by 20% of its population after the quakes which destroyed 474 buildings in the Colonia and damaged another 1,400.

The government is current-

ly carrying out four housing programs for earthquake victims: the Emergency Housing Project in two phases, the program to renovate popular housing and the program to rebuild Tlatelolco. According to figures provided by the Department for Urban Development and Ecology, the first phase of the Emergency Housing Project has now been completed, and 13,000 housing units have been handed over to their new owners.

The huge housing complex at Tlatelolco was inaugurated 22 years ago and has

## The 1987 Housing Program

Through the housing program announced this year the government plans to issue 350,000 loans for home-building and for the purchase of land for home-sites, as well as for improvements on existing homes.

According to Gabino Fraga, Under-Secretary for Housing of the SEDUE (the Department for Urban Development and Ecology), the 1987 Program, with a budget of 2.4 billion pesos, will meet the annual demand for more than 300,000 homes due to population increase. SEDUE officials say there is a qualitative housing shortage—calculated in terms of over-crowding, lack of services and deteriorated buildings—as well as a quantitative shortage caused by the natural increase in population.

The 1987 Housing Program aims to work on both fronts and is part of national decentralization goals. Half of the loans are ear-

marked for 59 provincial cities, 35% for smaller urban areas and rural areas, and only 15% for the already crowded metropolitan areas of Monterrey, Guadalajara and Mexico City. The Program will provide 700,000 jobs in the construction industry as well as nearly two million indirect or complementary jobs in related services and industries. It also includes financial and tax incentives for people who build housing units for rent.

The Federal Government has also announced that it will set aside land for home-building in the main cities in order to allow for better planning in urban development and to restrain the chronic problem of invasion and settlement of vacant lots, city legalization of the situation and then new invasions in other areas.



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Sit-in by residents of several capital city neighborhoods in front of the Metropolitan Cathedral.

undergone dramatic changes since the earthquake due to continuous demolition and repair work. Eight buildings have been or will be demolished, another 32 need major repairs—9 of these will be reduced in height—while a further 60 buildings are undergoing minor repairs. 8,400 damaged apartments will be recovered through these works.

Shortly after the earthquake, the government expropriated 3,107 blocks of city land under the program to renovate popular housing (RHP), and has now handed



over 48,800 renewed housing units. The current tenants are going to pay some \$3,000 for these homes, in payments to be made over a period of eight years.

In a paper presented to the International Metropolis Congress held in Mexico City in May, the Director General of RHP, Manuel Aguilera Gómez, reported on a study of housing conditions in the expropriated areas. According to

bathroom, kitchenette and laundry, in 40 square meters of space.

Under the RHP program the government provided 22,300 temporary shelters for use during the reconstruction period. The shelters were usually made of asbestos and galvanized aluminum and were equipped with electricity, water and gas. Here groups of 20 families shared bathroom and kitchen facilities.

The RHP program has also been in charge of restoring some 200 buildings classified as historical monuments. These buildings have been restored as dwelling places while at the same time respecting their antiquity and their architectural value.

The second phase of the Emergency Housing Program began in July 1986 with a budget of 45 billion pesos, (some \$30 million) to finance work on 15,940 damaged homes. 79% of the programs resources are earmarked for reconstruction and the remaining 21% is for repairs.

In addition to government efforts, non-government organizations such as the Red Cross, UNICEF and church groups have also worked in reconstruction, while universities and professional groups have provided technical assistance.

Residents in the damaged areas have also contributed to reconstruction, with their labor as well as in decision-making processes. Community organizations have sprung up and have now been working together for nearly two years. Both men and women report positively on their post-earthquake experiences in terms of cooperation among neighbors and in the learning of building techniques. (See Voices number 2).

In an ambitious attempt to reduce the national housing deficit, the government's 1987 housing program was allotted a budget of 2.4 billion pesos and includes facilities for 350,000 new loans for homes.

According to the report Metropolis and Health presented to the Metropolis 1987 Congress by Dr. Jorge

Ruiz de Esparza of the Conurbation Commission for Central Mexico, in 1980, 24% of the homes in the Mexico city metropolitan area had only one room, and 34% of the population lived in these conditions. In the same vein, a Bank of Mexico (Banamex) report called "La vivienda en México" (Housing in Mexico) states that in 1980 an average 5.5 people lived in each home.

The Banamex report also estimates that there will be a demand for 9.5 million housing units in Mexico by the year 2,000. A little under half of these, 4.3 million, will be necessary because of the deterioration of existing homes, while 5.2 million additional units will be needed because of natural population growth.

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Photo from Unomasuno Archive

The Neighborhood Assembly marches near Los Pinos, the presidential residence.

this study, before the earthquake, 63% of the population did not have their own bathroom, while 29% shared kitchens. Half of the homes studied lacked efficient water supplies and drainage. Mr. Aguilera said that the new housing—in blocks no more than three stories high—provides families with a living room, two bedrooms,

## The Fishing Industry Moves Forward

Over a million tons of seafood are hauled in each year

Mexico's fishing industry is like a small boat which has miraculously escaped being shipwrecked. In the midst of the economic storm this country is living through, this sector has achieved an average growth rate of 8 per cent. No other Mexican industry has managed that.

The Fishing Department believes the industry is in a state of inertia as far as growth is concerned. But, though production in 1986 was slightly lower than in 1982, it has fished over a million tons per year during eight consecutive years.

Mexican fishermen brought in 1.354 million tons of fish in 1986 alone; more than many other countries with a strong fishing tradition such as Britain, Spain, Portugal and Italy.

Ten years ago it was quite usual to hear people in Mexico say that most of their fishing potential was unused. Nowadays, not only is the consumer market duly supplied, but there is a large amount for export. This sector accounts for 4.8 per cent

### Fishing Production 1986

(In thousands of tons)

sardine	468
anchovy	116
tuna and similar species	102
shrimp	73
mojarra	67
algae and sargasso	50
oysters	43
shark	20
carp	17
dogfish	13
mullet	12
sawfish	10