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## ACT TO DEPLOY EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAM TO HAITI

The following news release has been received from Action by Churches Together (ACT) International, CLWR partner in the Haiti relief effort.

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Geneva - January 14 (17h00)

More than a million people in Haiti's capital will this evening be without shelter and no immediate prospect of accommodation in camps. Between 60 and 80 percent of the houses in Port-au-Prince were brought down or are uninhabitable by Tuesday's 7.0 magnitude earthquake.

In a city that ACT Alliance members say looks like a war zone, hundreds of thousands are roaming the streets looking desperately for relatives and other loved ones. Rescue and humanitarian operations are complicated because the United Nations is paralysed following the collapse of their building leaving over 100 staff missing.

These are the key points to come out of a teleconference by ACT Alliance members this evening, one of the rare opportunities to receive updates about the earthquake-struck city. Communications with Port-au-Prince have been unreliable, with Skype and other Internet-based communications providing the only news from Haiti.

ACT member LWF reports their staff have a fortnight's worth of water, food and fuel for their personal needs but stress that any extra staff coming to the city need to bring their own tents, food, sleeping bags and cash. All shops and banks are closed. Compounding the work is the fact staff – like everyone in Port-au-Prince - are traumatised from the disaster.

Desperate wait for news

ACT members around the world continue the anxious wait for news of missing colleagues. Staff from Lutheran World Service and UMCOR are among the tens of thousands missing, prompting requests from ACT Alliance for prayers.

ACT Alliance General Secretary John Nduna said that for the organisations with staff affected, ACT sent its heartfelt concern, solidarity and prayers. "Let's hope that those missing will be found alive."

He has written to the two members and has also sent a letter of condolence to the UN for the 16 UN staff confirmed killed in their building collapse.

From some quarters there has been good news. Evelyne Margrone, a programme officer of ACT member ICCO has been recovered alive from the debris and was taken to

Dominican Republic suffering multiple bone fractures and possible internal injuries. Her grandson was found unhurt.

The earthquake wreaked devastation on Haiti, a country already struggling with the worst poverty in the western hemisphere. The situation in Port-au-Prince today remains grave. The BBC reports that rescue teams and medical services are overwhelmed. Many people are still sleeping outside fearing aftershocks or because homes have been reduced to rubble. President Rene Preval estimates the death toll could be 50,000, Reuters Alertnet reports.

ACT members reported yesterday that blocked streets continued to make needs assessment visits very difficult. Many houses in the slums have collapsed, triggered by the shallow nature of the quake. Little heavy equipment can be found to free trapped survivors, remove rubble and clear streets. Even shovels are in short supply.

#### Rapid Response Team

For the first time, ACT Alliance is sending personnel from its emergency support team to assist members in Haiti. The Rapid Support Team will be made up of a coordinator (Elsa Moreno), a finance officer (Eric Celiz) and a communicator (Sarah Wilson).

The core RST team will assist implementing members prepare the preliminary appeal, coordinate with other agencies and prepare external and internal communications.

As coordinator of the ACT Haiti forum, Lutheran World Federation is taking the lead on the response.

Among the relief ACT's Norwegian Church Aid is preparing to send water and sanitation engineers, and a transport plane loaded with equipment to construct water purification systems. NCA is also sending elements for building latrines, as the sanitation situation is critical. DanChurchAid has seconded a staff member to support LWF on logistics.

ACT members working in Haiti are:

Christian Aid - CA

Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe – DKH

Lutheran World Federation – LWF

Interchurch Organisation for Development Cooperation – ICCO