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Christian Service in Relief, Disaster, Settlement and Development

Help from ACT reaching people of Haiti

Winnipeg, January 18, 2010 – Below is the latest release received from Actions from Churches Together (ACT) on the situation in Haiti. The Lutheran World Federation is one of seven members of ACT who have an on-the-ground presence in Haiti. Your donations to the CLWR Appeal for Haiti are assisting these efforts.

ACT Alliance support reaching Haiti

In the chaos of aid distribution, ACT Alliance members are managing to get food, temporary shelter, water cleaning materials and expertise to the Haitian capital.

Prosperity Raymond, country manager for ACT member Christian Aid, reports he is concerned there may not otherwise be enough food in the country to last more than a few days.

The streets are still thronged with homeless people, walking for hours to find food and water. As well as widespread destruction of homes, schools and other buildings, major damage has been done to key water, electricity and road systems. Port-au-Prince's heavily congested airport is finally allowing some aid to get through, however it comes as Haitians turn on each other, increasingly desperate for food and water.

One of the largest alliances working on relief in Haiti, ACT Alliance has four members working in-country and is being supplemented by relief from others. From the January 17 ACT teleconference:

- Christian Aid reports it has started distributing food and tents, hygiene kits, blankets, jerry cans and water purifiers to 15,000 people in eight communities, targeting areas getting little help from other agencies. It has also sent in a medical team through a specialist healthcare organisation. CA hopes to source food from markets in Haiti if possible, but all other items will definitely need to come in from outside. The team in Haiti is co-ordinating with colleagues in the Dominican Republic to source materials there where possible.
- Lutheran World Federation is constructing a camp for ACT members at its compound, with additional space for member staff. Cooking facilities are provided, and Internet connection is good. Water supply is problematic. LWF plans to recruit supplementary staff.

- Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe has programmed delivery of 15 tonnes of food relief together with Caritas Germany.
- Lutheran World Relief plans to send a shipment of food products.
- Church World Service and Christian Aid offices are ready to serve as a base for receiving emergency items. ACT member staff in St Domingo are on the way to Haiti.
- Norwegian Church Aid is prioritizing water sanitation equipment and psychosocial work. It has sent a team of water engineers, a communicator and a logistician. Two Norwegian advisors with expertise in gender and childrens' protection are also going.
- ACT members report that buildings remain very fragile and continue to collapse. Rain has compounded the situation of the million people without shelter. The border with the Dominican Republic remains insecure. Health risks of contagious diseases are getting serious. Other towns are also badly affected and many areas outside Port-au-Prince remain unexplored. An number of staff from ACT members in the country remain unaccounted for.

The United Nations has launched an appeal for \$562m intended to help three million people for six months. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon describes the situation as one of the worst humanitarian crises in decades and implored for calm in the beleaguered capital. The number of dead is still unknown, with estimates ranging from 50,000 to 200,000, the BBC reports.

No-one immune from the devastation

The earthquake has affected every part of society, including the people normally in charge of vital services, ACT's Christian Aid reports. The UN chain of command was badly hit by the loss of staff, although MINUSTAH started collecting dead bodies from the streets on Friday. The Government had already started putting bodies into mass graves. Some people in Port-au-Prince have lost all their money because it is in their collapsed homes.

Phones have not been working although Irish telephone company, Digicel, said that it has got its network going again and that calls were free, to allow people to call their families and let them know they are alive.

There has been a lot of social solidarity, with people helping rescue each other from the rubble. Christian Aid's country manager, Prosperity Raymond, was pulled from the wreckage of the CA office by a passerby. A large number of people, perhaps 100,000, have left the city to stay with friends and family in other parts of the country.

Prosperity has neighbours staying in his front yard. Both he and ACT communicator Sarah Wilson slept in cars last night while others are sleeping in tents, too afraid aftershocks will cause buildings to collapse further. Aftershocks are still occurring and people in the DKH office fled the building yesterday when one occurred. Fortunately, no more damage occurred.

There are also reports that the Dominican Republic has closed its border with Haiti.

Sarah Wilson's journey to Port-au-Prince

ACT's Sarah Wilson describes the tough journey to Port-au-Prince, highlighting the problems all aid agencies share moving to and from the disaster area. She Skyped from an

NGO office in Port-au-Prince, which many people are sharing. The office lacks enough computers for everyone but does have electricity.

Sarah reached Port-au-Prince on Friday morning local time, having earlier flown out from Santo Domingo only for the plane to turn around and return because it was unable to land. There was chaos at the airport in Port-au-Prince. The air traffic control tower was damaged and the US military had brought in radar equipment as a substitute.

Sarah and her fellow passengers rushed off the plane and had to walk down the runway as other planes were trying to land. Normal airport safety procedures had been abandoned. As soon as the luggage was unloaded, the plane had to take off again to make way for others landing.

In Port-au-Prince, everything is in short supply, including petrol and food. Supermarkets are open but it is almost impossible to get near the food, which people are fighting for. On Friday, Sarah and Christian Aid country manager Prosperity Raymond each had one potato for supper. They had eggs and bread for breakfast today.

Shortages are even affecting the Dominican Republic now, where supplies of tents and water purification equipment are running low.