



Canadian Lutheran
World Relief®

Christian Service in Relief, Disaster, Settlement and Development

LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION ON THE GROUND IN HAITI

January 15, 2010 - Canadian Lutheran World Relief's (CLWR) partner agency, the Lutheran World Federation, is on the front lines in Haiti playing a lead role in the Action by Churches Together (ACT) response to the humanitarian crisis there. Below is a press release from the LWF on the situation in Haiti. CLWR is a member of the ACT Alliance. CLWR has already made an initial transfer of funds to ACT to assist in its work in Haiti.

News Release from Lutheran World Information (LWI)

PORT-AU-PRINCE Haiti/GENEVA, 15 January 2010 (LWI) - "It looks like a war zone." This was how Eric Celiz, finance officer of the Caribbean/Haiti program of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Department for World Service (DWS) described the situation in the Haitian capital Port-au-Prince, following the 7.0 magnitude earthquake that struck on 12 January.

It is said to be the most powerful quake to hit the region in 200 years, causing unimaginable suffering in this Caribbean country which is already one of the poorest in the world.

"So far no real help is in sight," Celiz reported. He said streets were crowded with people fleeing their homes for fear of aftershocks that continued to rattle the earth, or whose homes have been destroyed. The magnitude of the catastrophe has left a shocked feeling of helplessness. People linger stunned before mounds of rubble with no genuine means of intervening. Others remain buried under the rubble and cry out for help, but the necessary equipment is lacking. "It is an enormous moral dilemma for everyone, including our staff," he said.

Ms Sylvia Raulo, director of the DWS Caribbean/Haiti program said between 60 and 80 percent of the buildings in the capital city have been destroyed or are uninhabitable. The Haitian Red Cross Society reports that as many as 50,000 people have died and up to 3 million are injured or homeless.

Raulo says the immediate priority is to assess the extent of damage and assistance required. One of the DWS program's other major tasks will be to set up temporary shelters for people who have lost everything. For the moment it appears that no country program staff have been injured although one staff member has not been accounted for, she said.

Meanwhile, ACT Alliance, the largest global alliance of churches and related humanitarian and development agencies, has begun providing extensive emergency assistance. A first rapid

support team in which the LWF is participating has already been dispatched to Haiti and will assist local organizations in assessing the damage and the help that is needed.

Speaking to *Lutheran World Information (LWI)*, LWF/DWS director Rev. Eberhard Hitzler said the top priority was coordinating the collaborating members and their relief operations. "When such a disaster strikes, everyone wants to help. As good as that may be, we must avoid a situation in which a multitude of organizations work in an uncoordinated manner," he said. DWS was fortunate in that the Haiti program office was intact and most staff are well, he noted. Before the quake, DWS had been coordinating its activities within the ACT Alliance framework. As the LWF currently chairs the ACT Forum in Haiti, it is responsible for coordinating the massive relief assistance being offered by churches and related agencies to ensure that it reaches people quickly and effectively. "We can only thank God that we have such experienced people whom we can rely on," said Hitzler.

It is also important that efforts be coordinated locally with the Red Cross, United Nations agencies and other partners, emphasized the DWS director. "Unfortunately, we do not have the equipment to rescue trapped victims," noted Hitzler, "but we are able to participate in relief work such as water and food distribution."

Another short-term measure would be the setting up of temporary shelters for those who lost everything they had, including the roof over their heads. Hitzler pointed out that DWS has broad international experience in this sector - assisting refugees and internally displaced persons - and collaborates closely with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Hitzler also noted another crucial coordination problem in view of international aid. As DWS has extremely limited food and fuel reserves for its own staff that would last for only a short time, it has requested all relief volunteers to bring their own food, gear such as sleeping bags and sufficient cash with them to Haiti. (655 words)

Further information about the LWF/DWS Caribbean/Haiti program is available at:
http://www.lutheranworld.org/What_We_Do/DWS/Country_Programs/DWS-Caribbean-Haiti.html