

Remarks on Earthquake Relief Efforts in Haiti

January 15, 2010

Good afternoon, everybody. I wanted to just make a brief statement on the latest situation in Haiti so that the American people are fully up to date on our efforts there.

This morning I spoke with President Preval of Haiti, who has been in regular contact with our Ambassador on the ground. I expressed to President Preval my deepest condolences for the people of Haiti and our strong support for the relief efforts that are underway.

Like so many Haitians, President Preval himself has lost his home, and his Government is working under extraordinarily difficult conditions. Many communications are down and remain—and many people remain unaccounted for. The scale of the devastation is extraordinary—as I think all of us are seeing on television—and the losses are heartbreaking.

I pledged America's continued commitment to the Government and the people of Haiti in the immediate effort to save lives and deliver relief and in the long-term effort to rebuild. President Preval and I agreed that it is absolutely essential that these efforts are well-coordinated among the United States and the Government of Haiti, with the United Nations, which continues to play an essential role, and with the many international partners and aid organizations that are now on the ground.

Meanwhile, American resources continue to arrive in Haiti. Search and rescue efforts continue to work, pulling people out of the rubble. Our team has saved both the lives of American citizens and Haitian citizens, often under extraordinarily difficult circumstances.

Now, this morning the aircraft carrier USS *Carl Vinson* arrived, along with helicopters that will be critical in delivering assistance in the days to come. They are preparing to move badly needed water, food, and other lifesaving supplies to priority areas in Port-au-Prince. Food, water, and medicine continues to arrive, along with doctors and aid workers.

At the airport, help continues to flow in, not just from the United States, but from Brazil, Mexico, Canada, France, Colombia, and the Dominican Republic, among others. This underscores the point that I made to the President this morning: The entire world stands with the Government and the people of Haiti. For in Haiti's devastation, we all see the common humanity that we share.

And as the international community continues to respond, I do believe that America has a continued responsibility to act. Our Nation has a unique capacity to reach out quickly and broadly and to deliver assistance that can save lives.

That responsibility obviously is magnified when the devastation that's been suffered is so near to us. Haitians are our neighbors in the Americas, and for Americans, they are family and friends. It's characteristic of the American people to help others in time of such severe need. That's the spirit that we will need to sustain this effort as it goes forward.

There are going to be many difficult days ahead. So many people are in need of assistance. The port continues to be closed, and the roads are damaged. Food is scarce, and so is water. It will take time to establish distribution points so that we can ensure that resources are delivered safely and effectively and in an orderly fashion.

But I want the people of Haiti to know that we will do what it takes to save lives and to help them get back on their feet. In this effort, I want to thank our people on the ground: our men and women in uniform, who have moved so swiftly; our civilians and Embassy staff, many of whom suffered their own losses in this tragedy; and those members of search and rescue teams from Florida and California and Virginia, who've left their homes and their families behind to help others. To all of them: I want you to know that you demonstrate the courage and decency of the American people, and we are extraordinarily proud of you.

I also want to thank the American people more broadly. In these tough times, you've shown extraordinary compassion, already donating millions of dollars. I encourage all of you who want to help to do so through whitehouse.gov, where you can learn about how to contribute.

And tomorrow I will be meeting with President Clinton and President George W. Bush here at the White House to discuss how to enlist and help the American people in this recovery and rebuilding effort going forward.

I would note that as I ended my call with President Preval, he said that he has been extremely touched by the friendship and the generosity of the American people. It was an emotional moment. And this President, seeing the devastation around him, passed this message to the American people. He said, "From the bottom of my heart and on behalf of the people of Haiti, thank you, thank you, thank you."

As I told the President, we realize that he needs more help and his country needs more help, much more. And in this difficult hour, we will continue to provide it.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:08 p.m. in the Diplomatic Reception Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to U.S. Ambassador to Haiti Kenneth H. Merten. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

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