

Posted at <http://www.crs.org/haiti/letter-from-field/>, February 4, 2010, by Catholic Relief Services

Letter From Haiti: Thank You All



People line up to receive food bags filled with lentils, soy, fortified bulgur and vegetable oil provided by USAID's Food For Peace program at the Petionville Golf Club in Haiti. Photo by Sara A. Fajardo/CRS

Hello Everyone,

It's a Friday afternoon, sardines and rice have just been served from the office kitchen, hot water finally made an appearance (some of us have been pouring Starbucks instant packets into cold water), and so it seemed the perfect time to drop a line to say hello!

I hope all is well with you. I know many of you are in touch with the updates here on a regular basis, but I had to write to say thank you for all of the support you are providing from across the United States—it goes such a long way here, especially when the clock runs late and the emotions grow weary.

It is just over two weeks since the earthquake struck and the emergency operation here is in a solid rhythm. You would be proud of the staff who have been deployed from all parts of the country and the CRS world, bringing their expertise and ability to see a path to recovery amid the piles of debris.

There's Dave Coddington, the guru of logistics, who can get any material or mode of transportation with a phone and flash of personality. To hear him secure a vessel of shelter and medical kits—like he did over the phone today for 50,000 people—is like hearing him learn of a winning touchdown by his hometown team, only what he scores for people here means the difference between sleeping under skies of rain or sturdy shelter, having medical care or lifelong pain, and so much more.

Donal Reilly is out every day under the blazing sun in the camps to manage food and shelter distributions for hundreds of thousands of people. He keeps his humor despite the tremendous difficulty of his job. His work requires complex management of thousands of tons of food, dozens of volunteers, and safety for the beneficiaries and all those involved. He leaves early and returns late, dusty, weather-beaten, and, like last night, with a minor wound here or there from a tumble or heavy lifting.

Donal Reilly, deputy director of the emergency response team, coordinates the CRS and Caritas USAID food delivery at the Petionville Club, one of the largest food distributions in Port-au-Prince. Photo by Lane Hartill/CRS



Just this week, Donal managed a food distribution that reached nearly 40,000 people at the Petionville Country Club—one of the finest spots in the city before the earthquake, and now home to 50,000 people sprawled across the trampled lawns, their former city homes in pieces. The fourth tee is the staging ground for distributions; the tennis courts are where the food

kits are prepared. Military trucks squeeze into parking spots made for golf carts. The U.S. military helps to maintain security, though thankfully we haven't experienced any serious incidents. A representative from the U.S. government's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance told our colleagues today that the distribution he witnessed at Petionville is the best he has seen—not only in Haiti, but in his years-long history in disaster relief.

Still, it's hard to feel elated when people are weighed down with heavy hearts. The needs are enormous. While roads are starting to clear and relief is reaching hundreds of thousands of people, the toppled buildings, sprawling camps and tented homes set up on the roadside at sundown are sobering reminders of the long road ahead. Fears loom about the oncoming rainy season and the critical needs for emergency shelter and sanitation. Many Haitians describe the difficulty of grieving for their loved ones when they are without the means to perform burial rituals. Our Haitian colleagues perform to the best of their ability despite many having lost immediate family members and seen all that they own transformed into debris. It's not uncommon to receive a blank stare when asking a work-related question, a quick reminder that some of the people our colleagues loved more than anything in the world are no longer here.

The Catholic Relief Services Haiti staff returned to work this week. All have received food and shelter relief, as well as counseling and medical care. A clinic is set up under tents on the grounds of our offices here in Port-au-Prince, and staff—with their family members—have the opportunity to sit with a doctor, a nurse and a counselor, to be heard and cared for, and relieved of some of their pain.



CRS driver Rubens Dervilus, right, helps Sister Elizabeth pass out food provided by CRS to the orphans at Foye Ti Zanmi Jezi Orphanage on Saturday, January 30. Photo by Sara A. Fajardo/CRS

We are all shouldering the loss in some way here, but I hope you can take pride in some of the burden you've helped to lift. As of today, February 4, alongside our Church and Caritas partners, we have been able to achieve the following:

- Distribution of food to 264,200 people, and non-food items to 25,000 people.
- Provision of medical care and treatment to a total of 4,126 people, and hygiene kits to 10,000 people.
- Support of medical materials and supplies, volunteer doctors and nurses, food, water and other support to expand emergency medical care at St. Francois de Sales Hospital.
- Establishment of three functioning operating rooms—conducting an average of 12 severe surgical cases per day—as well as a laboratory, X-ray room and blood bank at St. Francois de Sales Hospital.
- Resumption of health care at 12 highly populated areas in Port-au-Prince and Leogane.
- Launching of public health campaign carried out through megaphone and radio.
- Installation of four water storage and purification units in various areas of the city, and water and sanitation assessments in another 14 locations.
- Creation of designs to build a latrine at St. Francois de Sales Hospital, and an initial strategy for drainage, showers and sanitation at camps and temporary settlements.
- Guidelines for sanitation and hygiene kits.
- Initial standards and guidelines for emergency shelter kits and transitional shelters, technical standards for assessing habitability of buildings, and standards for debris-cleaning and cash-for-work activities.

It is going to be a long road to recovery, and our teams of water engineers, architects, doctors, logisticians, counselors and managers are mapping out the transitional and long-term programming that fits with the needs and context for people to rebuild their lives. We'll be sure to share those updates and stories with you.

In the meantime, thank you for making this possible and please keep the people of Haiti in your thoughts and prayers.

A saying is popular in Haiti that you can hear on the streets and in camps:

"Nou bite men nou pap tonbe. We may stumble but we will not fall."

Indeed, with your support, few things have rung so true.

Sincerely,

Caroline

A senior communications officer for CRS, Caroline Brennan is in Haiti to report on the progress of earthquake recovery efforts. [Adapted by Missions Office, www.seattlearch.org/missions.]