

Haiti Earthquake Relief Efforts Summary

District 7020

January 27, 2010

On Wednesday January 27, 2010 a delegation of Rotarians (PRID Barry Rassin, RIDE John Smarge, PDG Richard McCombe and PP Carla McCombe, DGE Diana White) along with one Orthopedic Surgeon (Dr. Patrick McGrath) who would stay, and ZNS News Anchor Jerome Pyfrom and Videographer Burton Wallace flew from Nassau to Pignon, Haiti. Our purpose was not to visit the epicenter but to meet with the Rotarian Leaders who have working tirelessly to bring relief to all they can.

We met at the Hôpital de Bienfaisance de Pignon which is run by DGN Dr. Guy Theodore. Dr. Theodore, AG Caleb Lucien and Adele Noel-Romelus from Pignon met us at the airport and transported us to the Hospital. AG Dr. Claude Surena, PP George Nicolas and Jean-Baptiste Brown flew to Pignon from Port-au-Prince to join us and ensure that we understand the present conditions and anticipated short term future needs of the most affected areas. Dr. Surena is our Rotary Disaster Chair for Haiti and also the President of the Haitian Medical Association and was appointed by President Preval to coordinate the receipt and distribution of all medical relief. His complete involvement into the relief efforts of the country is a great help for us to understand what is happening and what we need to do to assist. The Rotarians from Pignon have been coordinating the delivery of items sent in by Rotary to ensure they get to the appropriate people.

We only had a few hours as Dr. Surena had to return to meet with President Preval. When the meeting concluded we toured the Hospital which is overloaded with victims from the earthquake. We also toured the Hosean Mission and saw the housing for visiting physicians.

Below I have summarized the primary points made during our meeting:

1. The Government of Haiti immediately called a State of Emergency for three months which will enable an easier and more efficient entry of goods and medical personnel into the country. This could be extended to six months.
2. The acute relief efforts are coming to an end over the next couple days.
3. The next phase will be on fixed clinics and then hospitals as the medical care becomes much more focused.
4. They are working closely with WHO to get the supplies and equipment needed for patient care.
5. Orthopedic supplies and strong antibiotics (Bactrim, Cipro and Keflex) are still the most urgently needed in the medical area and will be for some time.
6. The Hospitals have been treating and the patients are recovering to go home but they have no home to go to. The plan is to put tents up next to the Hospitals in order to provide a step down situation for the patients out of the hospital.

7. They estimate a need of 200,000 tents to house those who lost their homes. Not necessarily full blown shelter boxes but just the tents.
8. Dr. Surena suggested that one possible Rotary project, in partnership with other agencies, would be to establish a Rehabilitation Center for all those who need Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy and Psychosocial Counseling. In conjunction with the facility we need to establish a workshop for artificial limbs (DGE Diana White has begun discussions with the Rotary Jaipur Limb project to plan for establishing locally the necessary workshops). There have been a substantial number of persons with crushed limbs resulting in amputations.
9. The School System in Port-au-Prince has been shut down. Those migrating to unaffected areas of the country are now causing an overflow situation in all schools that are available to continue. Many children have no school to attend.
10. The Government is now setting up a committee to handle the airport landing priorities as the Port-au-Prince airport has been overwhelmed.
11. Significant Rotary manpower will be needed but not yet.
12. They are in great need for psychological counselor who speaks Creole.
13. There is probably no more need for Rotary to supply medical teams as other organizations have now geared up and are providing appropriate manpower in the medical arena.
14. There is an urgent need for Food and water and that will continue for some time. While fixed and pre-prepared foods are good they would like to see more of a focus on staple goods like Rice and Beans. They will need to provide about 150,000 meals per day for many months to come. They are able to buy some of the basic food items locally for distribution if they could receive cash donations to do so. That would also help the economy.
15. They need clothes including shoes as they lost all of their possessions. They ask for separated and sorted clothes.
16. They understand the need for an overall plan for relief and will begin on that task as they can; however they must do all they can to sustain life and develop an ability for the population to become self sufficient in the short term.
17. They have begun a concerted effort to locate Rotarians from all of the five Rotary Clubs that were affected. We will develop a report from each of the five Rotary Clubs so that we can also support them and assist them as individuals as they are also victims of the disaster. They have lost everything and need our help.
18. We are considering the purchase of a truck for Rotary in Haiti in order to help them move the high volume of supplies from the ports or the airports to those that have been targeted for distribution and assistance. What Rotary sends in aid is received by Rotarians and distributed to those in need.
19. All of these priorities listed does not mean that there are not other needs like x-ray machines, autoclaves, or specific supplies, but these listed are considered the top priorities for Rotary to pursue.
20. We in Nassau are now organizing a cargo ship to take into Port-au-Prince all the collected supplies from Rotary in The Bahamas, The Red Cross and the Methodist Conference. We are able to fill about 12 containers or more and so it will be much more effective to spend about \$40,000 for the ship to transport the goods. We will ship when the Port is ready to accept which is expected in two weeks.

- We will need the cash to pay for the ship but the containers are being lent to us at no charge. Again our Rotarians will meet and unload and distribute.
21. The Rotarians in Haiti greatly appreciate the outpouring of support from Rotary in The Bahamas and the District 7020 but also from all the neighboring districts and around the world. They are strong and positive and will continue to work to bring their country to the healthy, vibrant and productive country that it needs to be.
 22. They specially thanked PDG Richard (Dick) McCombe for his incredible support and assistance from the first moment of the disaster. They also thanked RIDE John Smarge and DGE Diana White for our District 7020 for taking the time to fly in for this visit. They also appreciate the hard work being done by Rotarians within our District led by our excellent District Governor Errol Alberga.

We ask Rotary Clubs and Rotary Districts to consider the above and work with us to focus on their needs for today. However, please keep in mind that this is a long term relief effort and we will be part of the rebuilding and will need significant cash to participate in meaningful projects as time goes by and we have a plan in place for us to help implement.

I am proud to be a Rotarian and know that Rotary around the world will work side by side with our Rotarians in Haiti to bring them to a new and positive era for their country.

Please stay current with the needs as the transitioning of relief efforts will continue.

Barry Rassin
PRID 2006-2008