

EUROPEAN COMMISSION



Humanitarian Aid

Letter from Haiti

by Juan Carlos Rincón-Domínguez, ECHO Regional Information Officer for Latin America and the Caribbean.

Port au Prince, 2 February 2010



"Hello. We're all safe, but we need money to carry on. Can you send us a little from Paris?" she asks her relatives at the other end of the line. The person holding the receiver is Adeline, a middle-aged Haitian with two sons. She is calling France on the free service provided by Telecoms Sans Frontières. TSF, an ECHO partner, has helped thousands of people in the quake zone to communicate with their families abroad.

Adeline learned about the free call system through a volunteer in the Delmas 40B camp, who had toured the area with a megaphone the previous day.

"The local authorities gave us a spot to set up our equipment and the volunteers to work with us. They also provided security", explains Lester Flores, one of the TSF technical coordinators in the camp. "And the response is incredible." He tells us that more than 70% of callers are adult women, usually the head of family.

The camp, located on a golf course, is a temporary home to more than 10,000 people. Marie José is a volunteer who acts as receptionist. She writes out vouchers with the destination of the call, the name of the relative and the phone number. The caller then presents this to the operators who dial out on the satellite phones.

Beltran, a young Haitian who speaks English, Spanish and Creole and is a translator for a Spanish NGO, applauds the work of TSF. "They are doing a great job helping the people. If the line is busy or a wrong number is dialled, people are allowed to call again."

In Haiti, an international phone call costs about the same as a meal for a whole family (300 gourdes). This is why the TSF service is so important. When so much else has been lost, the chance to speak to loved ones far away is a precious opportunity.