

EUROPEAN COMMISSION



Humanitarian Aid

Letter from Haiti

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We left Port au Prince at sunrise and arrived in Santo Domingo at 1.30 pm. I had thought that we would see many Haitians fleeing the country. It was not so. Life seems to be getting back to "normal" and the border is very far away for many.

On the Haitian side, the route is still in a poor condition, full of holes, unpaved, dusty and insecure due to the volume of trucks, motorbikes and the many convoys carrying aid supplies. But we were lucky thanks to our driver Nicolás who brought us quickly and safely to the Dominican capital.

I saw only small groups of Haitians travelling from Port au Prince to the border, and along the 320 km between both capitals. We did see two huge refugee camps on the Haitian side full of people displaced from the capital after the earthquake.

After following the big Saumatre reservoir, we arrived after 80 minutes on the Haitian side of the border in Malpasse which means "bad pass" – and it was chaos. The area is a duty-free open air market in which hundreds of Haitians trade, exchange goods and buy food. It is like a "no man's land" where everything is thrown together, including the policemen who control the area and the passage across the border. This sector is about two km large and runs alongside the border crossing with the Dominican Republic.

The cars cross the border one by one after which there is an immediate change. The road is almost perfect, the landscape changes from the dry and arid to the green and luxuriant. Since the earthquake there are also military check points every 25 km designed to prevent Haitians crossing illegally.

Because of the damage to the ports and the limited capacity of the airport in Haiti, delivery of aid is by road. Due to the congestion at the border-crossings in Dajabón and Elías Piña, humanitarian aid now crossed at Jimaní, the third largest border crossing. This small city is in the process of rebuilding as it was destroyed by a flash flood in May 2004.

On the road to San Domingo, we passed three big convoys of aid going to Haiti. The first one with more than ten Red Cross trucks was carrying supplies, food and medicines. The other two were Canadian and Italian military convoys carrying heavy equipment such as big bulldozers, tow trucks, electric plants, cranes, tractors as well as engineering materials.

All these are the urgent supplies needed by the Haitians to survive the aftermath of the earthquake (food, tents, medicines) and to begin the long process of reconstruction.