



European Commission presence in Port-au-Prince prior to earthquake facilitating relief operations

A Commission humanitarian expert arrived on 13 January in Port-au-Prince on a needs assessment mission with representatives of the International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC), the Spanish Red Cross and the Dominican Red Cross. Thanks to previous recent financing, the capacity of several of the Commission's larger partners to evaluate needs in an emergency situation has been reinforced. The catastrophe in Haiti will demonstrate the effectiveness of this reinforcement, and will enable the improved evaluation and targeting of relief in this major crisis.

The first report confirmed that 70% of the city remained accessible by car; that there is visible damage on the majority of the main buildings; that major damage was concentrated in around 15 locations; and that, in all, 10% of buildings have been completely destroyed. This means that between 100 000 to 150 000 people have been made homeless. However, structural damage to those houses still standing is so massive that many have been rendered uninhabitable - thus increasing the number of people condemned to the streets.

Thousands of people are camping in parks and stadiums. In all, around forty open air spaces are being used for temporary shelter. People are arriving with the little they have salvaged from their flattened homes.

The entire communications network has been destroyed, with only satellite telephones or radios giving access to the outside world for the moment.

Numerous bodies covered by sheets or cardboard lay in the streets, and the wounded cannot be treated. The country's health system has been completely overwhelmed, and many of the capital's main hospitals have been reduced to rubble.

The most critical necessities at this time are: search and rescue teams essential for the next 48 hours; health and first-aid personnel; shelter for the homeless, and water and food which still must be fully evaluated.

Other Commission relief experts are en route for Port-au-Prince. They will continue to work with the partners to assess the most urgent needs in order to provide further funding once these needs have been identified.

For more information: http://ec.europa.eu/echo/index_en.htm

Contacts:

Office in Santo Domingo, Daniel Ureña (Spanish, French, English)
Mobile : +1 829 807 51 84 – santodomingo@echodom.net

ECHO Expert, Vicente Raimundo (Spanish, French & English)
Mobile: +1-809-910 05 46 - Satellite : 881-631-451-262

ECHO Information Officer, Raphaël Brigandi (French, German, English, Italian) in Haiti from the evening of 15/1/10

Mobile : +32 2 498 98 38 31

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