

EUROPEAN COMMISSION



Humanitarian Aid

## Letter from Haiti

by Susana Perez Diaz, Communication Officer, ECHO.

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For the first time, I will be venturing outside Port au Prince. From the outset of the disaster, the main attention has been focussed on the capital. However, we know that the needs outside the city are enormous, especially in the zone of the epicentre of the January quake, as well as the other side of the island as far as Jacmel.

We leave at 05.30 in the morning. The road is long and we have little idea what to expect.

On the coastal road up to Léogâne, traces of the earthquake are visible. It is clear that this part of the coast has been severely affected as was reported.

We leave the coast and climb towards Jacmel. The road has been damaged by the quake and in some places it is difficult to pass. We reach a passage which had been totally covered by a landslide. After a massive effort, the soil has now been cleared and we are able to pass. However, the torrential rains of yesterday evening have resulted in a thick covering of mud. Fortunately, we are in a four-wheel-drive vehicle so we are able to engage the steep path, but we regularly pass trucks which are blocked on the side of the road.

The mist-covered hill and the landslides are a strange spectacle. We arrive at the summit and begin our descent into the mist. Suddenly, the mist clears and we have a magnificent and clear view of the bay of Jacmel. It shows us the beauty of the landscape despite its exposure to the raging elements.

We discover another aspect of the consequences of the quake when we arrive in Jacmel. After the over-crowded neighbourhoods of Port-au-Prince, the damage to this rural region at first glance appears to be less substantial. When we meet with our meeting with our partner, German Agro Action, the consequences become more evident.

We see another type of response to the problem of cleaning up. Our partner has organised the clearing and evacuation of rubble. It has done this with the help of the local authorities and teams of Haitian volunteers. They clear the debris of houses identified by their owners, so that the owners can then pitch their tents on the site of their former homes. Often, those whose land has been cleared will propose that others also pitch their tents. The clean-up workers receive 200 gourdes and a hot meal a day for their work. For the moment around 16 teams of 21 people have been put to work. Up until now, around 50-60 houses have been cleared away and three larger sites have been freed up.

The other stages of their work will cover the repair and stabilisation of less-damaged houses. Materials and professionals have been put in place to execute quality work. Finally, catastrophe intervention teams are being trained and put in place in coordination with the local civil protection authorities.

The work is enormous but the concept of "cash for work" as described in humanitarian jargon, is helping a large number of people. This is one aspect contributing to the complicated and essential work of reconstruction. As one of our experts said "We must be very careful not to rebuild vulnerability"!