

Catholic Relief Services Responds to Earthquake in Haiti By Michael Hill/CRS

Catholic Relief Services staff in Haiti is responding immediately to the earthquake that rocked Port-au-Prince, the capital of Haiti. Tuesday night the agency made an immediate commitment of \$5 million for emergency supplies.

In a brief phone conversation before communication was lost, CRS Country Representative Karel Zelenka described Port-au-Prince as “covered with a plume of dust from damaged buildings.”

“I’ve been in earthquakes before, but I’ve never felt anything like this,” Zelenka said, speaking from the city of 2 million people. “This was a major hit. And it was direct. We should be prepared for thousands and thousands of dead and injured.”

Zelenka, who was concerned about the safety of his staff, said that the building housing the CRS Haiti headquarters was intact but that several major buildings had collapsed in the 7.0-magnitude quake, including one across the street. CRS staff members spent the night outside, fearing more damage due to aftershocks.

CRS has food and relief supplies pre-positioned in Haiti. Additional supplies such as plastic sheeting, hygiene kits, mosquito nets, and water purification tablets are being loaded in the Dominican Republic for distribution in Haiti.

As dawn came to Port-au-Prince this morning, Zelenka and CRS staff were working to get food and other emergency supplies that CRS has in the country for our longer-range programs positioned to help those devastated by the quake. But, he said, communication and transportation remain challenging.

Meanwhile, CRS is gearing up a full-scale emergency response.

“We’ve been in Haiti for more than 55 years,” said Bill Canny who, before he became CRS director of emergency operations in October was the country representative in Haiti and oversaw the response to two massive hurricanes in 2008. “This is going to be devastating to an already large, slum-like city.”

“We’re moving additional emergency staff in as quickly as possible, as we know it’s chaos in Port-au-Prince and help is needed immediately,” he said.

Canny said that CRS will be purchasing supplies in the Dominican Republic today and shipping them immediately to Haiti.

“We also have pre-positioned stocks in Miami that we are coordinating delivery for,” he said.

But Canny knows that the need will be great. “Search and rescue will have to find people in the rubble, treat people who are injured, secure food and water, and set up shelter for the homeless,” he said. “We will be working hard to bring help to these people who have suffered so much.”

To donate: www.crs.org
1-877-HELP-CRS (toll-free)

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