

## **Unimaginable Devastation in Haiti**

### **Salvation Army Information Bulletin at 14 January 2010**

In the aftermath of a devastating magnitude-7 earthquake that shook the country of Haiti recently and all but destroyed the city of Port au Prince, tens of thousands of people (and possibly many more) are feared dead.

The country is virtually paralysed, with little information flowing to the outside world because of downed power and communication lines.

Hospitals, schools and government buildings have collapsed, bodies are piled onto streets and untold numbers of people remain trapped in the wreckage. Medical services, water, food and shelter are all desperately needed according to The Salvation Army's Disaster Service's Coordinator in Haiti, Robert Poff.

The Salvation Army World Services Organisation (SAWSO), based in the USA, has sent Major George Polarek to Haiti to coordinate logistics to air-lift food and other essentials into Haiti. International Emergency Services personnel at IHQ are on standby to take action and at least 285,000 meals are ready to be immediately sent. Donations are flowing through Salvation Army centres internationally.

At the time of going to print (January 14), The Salvation Army's Robert Poff is also running a makeshift emergency triage with a small band of volunteers. The organisation's administrative compound is being used as an emergency operations centre with people sleeping in the parking lot.

The Salvation Army has been working in Haiti since 1950 and currently operates schools, clinics, a hospital, feeding programs, children's homes and church-related activities.

Many of The Salvation Army's buildings and facilities have seen significant damage, but personnel on the ground responded immediately, offering as much assistance as possible, including some shelter, food and clean water.

The Salvation Army's Disaster Service's Coordinator in Haiti, Robert Poff reported from Haiti in the immediate aftermath:

"Words cannot begin to describe the devastation that has taken place in Port au Prince, Haiti. I am the Director of Disaster Services for The Salvation Army in Haiti, and I am from the United States. My wife and I have been in Port au Prince since April, and have fallen deeply in love with the country and its people.

"When the earthquake struck, I was driving down the mountain from Petionville. Our truck was being tossed to and fro like a toy, and when it stopped, I looked out the windows to see buildings "pancaking" down, like I have never witnessed before. Traffic, of course, came to a stand-still, while thousands of people poured out into the streets, crying, carrying bloody bodies, looking for anyone who could help them. We piled as many bodies into the back of our truck, and took them down the hill with us, hoping to find medical attention. All of them were older, scared, bleeding, and terrified. It took about two hours to go less than one mile. Traffic was horrible, devastation was everywhere, and suffering humanity was front and centre.

"When we could drive no further, we left the truck parked on the side of the street, and walked the remaining two miles to get back to the Army compound. What I found was very sad! All of the security walls were down. The Children's Home itself seems pretty intact, but our quarters [home], which is attached, are destroyed. Unliveable. The walls and ceiling are still standing – but so badly compromised that I wouldn't even think of trying to stay there. All of the children, and hundreds of neighbours, are sleeping in our playground area tonight. Occasionally, there is another tremor – another reminder that we are not yet finished with this calamity. And when it comes, all of the people cry out and the children are terrified.

“As I am sitting outside now, with most people trying to get a little sleep, I can hear the moans and cries of the neighbors. One of our staff went to a home in the neighborhood, to try to be of assistance to the woman who lived there. But she was too late.

The scene will be repeated over and over again. Tomorrow, we will begin the process of assessing damage, learning about casualties, and preparing for the future.

God bless Haiti.”