

19 February 2010



Security Council

SC/9865

Department of Public Information • News and Media Division • New York

Security Council
6274th Meeting (AM)

HUMANITARIAN, PEACEKEEPING CHIEFS UNDERSCORE IMPORTANCE OF BOOSTING

HAITI'S RUBBLE-CLEARANCE EFFORTS, PROVIDING SHELTER, SANITATION

In Briefing to Security Council, Under-Secretaries-General Keep Spotlight on Post-Quake Needs While Rallying Support for Long-Term Recovery

Keeping the spotlight squarely on the vast needs in earthquake-devastated Haiti while rallying global support for the tiny, vulnerable country's long-term recovery, the top United Nations humanitarian and peacekeeping officials said today that it was now imperative that the international community bolster efforts by the Haitian Government to remove mountains of rubble and provide adequate shelter and sanitation facilities.

"The humanitarian situation in Haiti is undoubtedly improving day by day, but we are under no illusion about the scale of the challenges still ahead in the next weeks and months," said John Holmes, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, as he briefed the Security Council alongside Alain Le Roy, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations.

"There are no instant solutions. It will take time to cover all these needs, and care to maintain help to the most vulnerable without creating dangerous aid dependency," Mr. Holmes cautioned. "But we must not waver in helping several million people not only survive this catastrophe, but also rebuild their livelihoods and lives in a new and better way."

The briefing came one day after Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and Bill Clinton, United Nations Special Envoy for Haiti and former President of the United States, launched the Organization's largest-ever appeal for \$1.4 billion to assist 3 million Haitians -- a third of the Caribbean nation's population -- after last month's 7.0-magnitude quake, which levelled much of the capital, Port-au-Prince, and drove thousands of people into surrounding areas where they are now without proper shelter.

Having just returned from a visit to Haiti and the Dominican Republic -- a vital logistics hub and staging area for the massive relief operation -- Mr. Holmes said the humanitarian community would continue to support the Haitian Government in addressing the most urgent needs and gaps as the longer-term recovery and reconstruction processes gathered pace in parallel. "The worst of the medical emergency is behind us," he said, noting that around 3 million people had received food rations, and were continuing to do so, on an increasingly targeted basis.

Noting that clean water was available for the vast majority of those in need, he said that essential infrastructure such as the port, airport, electricity and telecommunications facilities, in addition to most roads -- which had been bottlenecks for relief and aid workers trying to get into the country in the earthquake's immediate aftermath -- were increasingly operational. "Every day, larger quantities of relief supplies are reaching Haiti and being distributed," he added, while making it clear that not everyone in need had been reached.

Indeed, much more would have to be done, especially in terms of emergency shelter, other non-food items and sanitation, he emphasized. With an estimated 1.2 million Haitians needing emergency shelter materials and waterproof tarpaulins to cover their heads, there was a desperate need not only for plastic sheeting, but also for tents before the rains began in earnest, Mr. Holmes said, calling for a “shelter and sanitation surge” to match the immediate post-earthquake effort to get food aid into the country.

While life might be returning to normal in some ways, the devastating effect of the earthquake was still abundantly evident in the capital and elsewhere, he said. The majority of people in need were in Port-au-Prince, but also in surrounding towns and cities, including Jacmel, and Léogane, the epicentre, where 80 per cent of the buildings had been destroyed. Mr. Holmes said he had been encouraged during his visit to note that, despite the logistical difficulties involved in reaching Léogane, a good deal had been happening in terms of relief assistance. More than 70 organizations were on the ground, including the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

However, Mr. Holmes said, it was also clear that some of the informal sites inhabited by those unable to return to their homes were not sustainable. They were overcrowded, makeshift shelters, vulnerable to floods and at serious risk from cooking fires. Identifying alternative sites was a challenge, but land should be easier to find in Léogane than in the more congested and geographically challenging context of Port-au-Prince, he said.

As an example, he cited an informal camp he had visited on the grounds of the Pétionville Club in Port-au-Prince, where tens of thousands of people had taken refuge. While he had been encouraged because the camp seemed calm, well organized, relatively clean and enjoying the availability of food and shelter materials as well as a rudimentary school, he had also been worried because it was obviously unsuitable and unsustainable, especially once the rainy season began.

The steep slopes and floodable areas at the bottom of the site meant that many people would soon have to be moved out, yet there was nowhere for them to go until alternative, more acceptable sites were made available, he said. “I give this detail because there are so many similar sites with high risks of flooding that also need to be decongested. So provision of suitable land is a high priority. We are working with the Government on this.” he added.

The Emergency Relief Coordinator said he had assured President René Préval that the United Nations was doing its utmost to meet emergency shelter and sanitation requirements before the rainy season, as well as making an early start on the huge task of removing rubble. Rapid clearance of some urban sites would free up areas into which people living on congested sites could move. “To do this we need to urgently mobilize more heavy equipment, including assets which the military and the private sector can provide, to supplement the efforts of the 75,000 Haitians who have already been engaged in the UN cash-for-work programmes,” he said. There was also a need to start a systematic effort to assess earthquake-affected structures so as to decide which should be demolished, which could be repaired and which could be used.

In his briefing, Mr. Le Roy said the 12 January earthquake had fundamentally changed the context in which the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) was operating. “There is no doubt that this will have — in fact, it already has — implications for MINUSTAH’s, and the broader United Nations, role.” He stressed that he counted on the Council’s support to ensure that the Mission continued to have the means required to help the Haitian Government meet the enormous challenges before it. However, a determination of the exact kind of assistance required should await the results of current assessments and the New York donors’ conference at the end of March.

The earthquake had hit Haiti just as it had been making significant strides towards stability and governance, he said. With the support of MINUSTAH, successful elections had been held, unprecedented security had been established and strategies for economic growth were under way. Now the international community must come together behind the Government and align their interventions and long-term plans with a national vision for reconstruction, providing both resources and technical assistance. “In doing so, we need to empower the Government, not supplant it,” he emphasized.

He said MINUSTAH had been focused since 12 January on the key objectives of supporting and assisting relief operations, ensuring security and public order and, in the face of enormous personnel and

infrastructure losses, restoring its own capacity. In the past five weeks, it had not only replaced its lost colleagues, numbering at least 91, including the Head of Mission, but also reinforced itself with more than 300 officers, and was able to perform all tasks required of it.

Thanks to rapid action by the Council, MINUSTAH was in the midst of an additional deployment of more than 1,500 troops and up to 500 police, which should be completed by the second week of March, said Mr. Le Roy. A flexible approach had allowed the Mission to perform its required tasks in good coordination with international partners. Additionally, MINUSTAH had made a priority of redeploying most police to earthquake-affected areas and helping the Haitian National Police restore their capacities, which had suffered a severe impact.

The security situation was stable but potentially fragile, and a resumption of gang violence was feared, he warned, recalling that hundreds of convicts considered dangerous had escaped from the destroyed prison in the capital. In addition, there had been a rise in opportunistic crimes such as theft, looting and assault. The Haitian National Police was following the situation closely, but unless essential conditions improved soon, people might be subject to political manipulation. The Council might therefore consider additional assistance to the Haitian National Police, such as the training of new agents.

Legislative elections planned for the end of March had been postponed and, while that had been broadly supported, it raised significant constitutional questions, he said, underscoring that ensuring some legislative capacity beyond 10 May, when the mandates of many legislators expired, was a key challenge that must be resolved quickly. In the meantime, there had been calls from many sectors for the replacement of the Government and for other changes, with some seeing the current situation as an opportunity to steer reconstruction efforts towards modernizing the State architecture through critical socio-economic reforms. To head off possibilities for instability, it was crucial to channel those discussions into an executive-led dialogue on the way forward, he said, noting that the Haitian Government was fully aware of the need for a broad political consensus before the March donors' conference.

Also taking the floor was Léo Mérorès, Permanent Representative of Haiti, who extended his sincere thanks to the "great family of nations" that had come together to assist his country, as well as his condolences to those who had suffered losses in the tragic event. He also welcomed Council resolution 1908 (2010), which had increased the MINUSTAH force ceiling, and thanked all personnel-contributing countries.

Assuring the Council that the Government was mobilizing to present a comprehensive recovery and reconstruction plan to the international community, he said the situation on the ground remained extremely worrisome. According to Government casualty figures, more than 270,000 people were dead, more than 250,000 buildings destroyed, more than a million people were living on the streets or in public places, and more than 4,000 dangerous criminals were roaming the streets. He called for intensified recovery activities as the rainy season approached.

Council President Gérard Araud (France) conveyed the 15-member body's appreciation for MINUSTAH's work, and pledged its continuing support to the nation and people of Haiti.

The meeting began at 10:11 a.m. and ended at 10:42 a.m.

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