

RELEASE IN PART B6

From: Abedin, Huma <AbedinH@state.gov>
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Why Haiti Matters

In the tragic aftermath of Haiti's 7.0 earthquake, images of the disaster break our hearts and remind us of the fragility of life. What America must do now—and why.

By Barack Obama | NEWSWEEK

Published Jan 15, 2010

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In the last week, we have been deeply moved by the heartbreaking images of the devastation in Haiti: parents searching through rubble for sons and daughters; children, frightened and alone, looking for their mothers and fathers. At this moment, entire parts of Port-au-Prince are in ruins, as families seek shelter in makeshift camps. It is a horrific scene of shattered lives in a poor nation that has already suffered so much.

In response, I have ordered a swift, coordinated, and aggressive effort to save lives in Haiti. We have launched one of the largest relief efforts in recent history. I have instructed the leaders of all agencies to make our response a top priority across the federal government. We are mobilizing every element of our national capacity: the resources of development agencies, the strength of our armed forces, and most important, the compassion of the American people. And we are working closely with the Haitian government, the United Nations, and the many international partners who are also aiding in this extraordinary effort.

We act for the sake of the thousands of American citizens who are in Haiti, and for their families back home; for the sake of the Haitian people who have been stricken with a tragic history, even as they have shown great resilience; and we act because of the close ties that we have with a neighbor that is only a few hundred miles to the south.

But above all, we act for a very simple reason: in times of tragedy, the United States of America steps forward and helps. That is who we are. That is what we do. For decades, America's leadership has been founded in part on the fact that we do not use our power to subjugate others, we use it to lift them up—whether it was rebuilding our former adversaries after World War II, dropping food and water to the people of Berlin, or helping the people of Bosnia and Kosovo rebuild their lives and their nations.

At no time is that more true than in moments of great peril and human suffering. It is why we have acted to help people combat the scourge of HIV/AIDS in Africa, or to recover from a catastrophic tsunami in Asia. When we show not just our power, but also our compassion, the world looks to us with a mixture of awe and admiration. That advances our leadership. That shows the character of our country. And it is why every American can look at this relief effort with the pride of knowing that America is acting on behalf of our common humanity.

Right now, our search-and-rescue teams are on the ground, pulling people from the rubble. Americans from Virginia and California and Florida have worked round the clock to save people whom they've never met. Our soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines, and Coast Guardsmen quickly deployed to the scene. Hand in hand with our civilians, they're laboring day and night to facilitate a massive logistical enterprise; to deliver and distribute food, water, and medicine to save lives; and to prevent an even larger humanitarian catastrophe.

Greater help is on the way. This will be a complex and difficult rescue and recovery operation, and it takes time to move all of the resources necessary into such a devastated environment. But more American rescue teams, doctors, nurses, and paramedics will arrive to care for the injured. More water, food, and supplies will be delivered. An aircraft carrier has arrived. A naval hospital ship has been deployed. And additional aircraft and heavy equipment will restore communications and clear roads and ports to speed relief and hasten recovery.

In addition, in this new century no great challenge will be one we can solve alone. In this humanitarian effort, we'll work closely with other nations, so that our work on the ground is efficient and effective even under what are very difficult conditions. We'll also join with the United Nations, which has done so much to bring security and stability to Haiti over the years, and which has suffered terrible losses in this tragedy. And we'll partner with the constellation of nongovernmental organizations that have a long and established record of working to improve the lives of the Haitian people.

It is also important to note that all of these efforts will be bolstered by the continuing good will and generosity of ordinary citizens. Governments alone are not enough. Already, a record number of donations have come in through text messaging. Money has poured into the Red Cross and other relief organizations. I want to thank the many Americans who have already contributed to this effort. And I want to encourage all Americans who want to help to go to whitehouse.gov to learn more.

And, lastly, in the days, months, and years ahead, we'll need to work closely with the government and people of Haiti to reclaim the momentum that they achieved before the earthquake. It is particularly devastating that this crisis has come at a time when—at long last, after decades of conflict and instability—Haiti was showing hopeful signs of political and economic progress. In the months and years to come, as the tremors fade and Haiti no longer tops the headlines or leads the evening news, our mission will be to help the people of Haiti to continue on their path to a brighter future. The United States will be there with the Haitian government and the United Nations every step of the way.

In the aftermath of disaster, we are reminded that life can be unimaginably cruel. That pain and loss is so often meted out without any justice or mercy. That "time and chance" happen to us all. But it is also in these moments, when we are brought face to face with our own fragility, that we rediscover our common humanity. We look into the eyes of another and see ourselves. And so the United States of America will lead the world in this humanitarian endeavor. That has been our history, and that is how we will answer the challenge before us.

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B6