

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

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REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
ON RESCUE EFFORTS IN HAITI

Diplomatic Reception Room

10:20 A.M. EST

THE PRESIDENT: Good morning, everybody. This morning I want to extend to the people of Haiti the deep condolences and unwavering support of the American people following yesterday's terrible earthquake.

We are just now beginning to learn the extent of the devastation, but the reports and images that we've seen of collapsed hospitals, crumbled homes, and men and women carrying their injured neighbors through the streets are truly heart-wrenching. Indeed, for a country and a people who are no strangers to hardship and suffering, this tragedy seems especially cruel and incomprehensible. Our thoughts and prayers are also with the many Haitian Americans around our country who do not yet know the fate of their families and loved ones back home.

I have directed my administration to respond with a swift, coordinated, and aggressive effort to save lives. The people of Haiti will have the full support of the United States in the urgent effort to rescue those trapped beneath the rubble, and to deliver the humanitarian relief -- the food, water and medicine -- that Haitians will need in the coming days. In that effort, our government, especially USAID and the Departments of State and Defense are working closely together and with our partners in Haiti, the region, and around the world.

Right now our efforts are focused on several urgent priorities. First, we're working quickly to account for

U.S. embassy personnel and their families in Port-au-Prince, as well as the many American citizens who live and work in Haiti. Americans trying to locate family members in Haiti are encouraged to contact the State Department at 888/407-4747. I'm going to repeat that - 888/407-4747.

Second, we've mobilized resources to help rescue efforts. Military overflights have assessed the damage, and by early afternoon our civilian disaster assistance team are beginning to arrive. Search and rescue teams from Florida, Virginia and California will arrive throughout today and tomorrow, and more rescue and medical equipment and emergency personnel are being prepared.

Because in disasters such as this the first hours and days are absolutely critical to saving lives and avoiding even greater tragedy, I have directed my teams to be as forward-leaning as possible in getting the help on the ground and coordinating with our international partners as well.

Third, given the many different resources that are needed, we are taking steps to ensure that our government acts in a unified way. My national security team has led an interagency effort overnight. And to ensure that we coordinate our effort, going forward, I've designated the administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development, Dr. Rajiv Shah, to be our government's unified disaster coordinator.

Now, this rescue and recovery effort will be complex and challenging. As we move resources into Haiti, we will be working closely with partners on the ground, including the many NGOs from Haiti and across Haiti, the United Nations Stabilization Mission, which appears to have suffered its own losses, and our partners in the region and around the world. This must truly be an international effort.

Finally, let me just say that this is a time when we are reminded of the common humanity that we all share. With just a few hundred miles of ocean between us and a long history that binds us together, Haitians are neighbors of the Americas and here at home. So we have to be there for them in their hour of need.

Despite the fact that we are experiencing tough times here at home, I would encourage those Americans who want to support the urgent humanitarian efforts to go to whitehouse.gov where you can learn how to contribute. We must be prepared for difficult hours and days ahead as we learn about the scope of the tragedy. We will keep the victims and their families in our prayers. We will be resolute in our response, and I pledge to the people of Haiti that you will have a friend and partner in the United States of America today and going forward.

May God bless the people of Haiti and those working on their behalf.

Thank you very much.