

Christian Aid Groups Mobilize Response to Haiti Earthquake

✖ Christian groups are among the international teams rushing to assist victims of a earthquake that rocked Haiti late Tuesday.

Samaritan's Purse arrived in Haiti Wednesday with rolls of plastic emergency shelter material, hygiene kits and water-purification kits. World Vision had 370 aid workers already in the nation and began distributing first-aid kits, as well as soap, blankets, clothes and water Wednesday after its staff had been accounted for.

A Haiti Red Cross official on Thursday estimated the death toll to be as high as 50,000 following the worst earthquake ever to hit the impoverished nation. The temblor struck just before 5 p.m. Tuesday. Its epicenter was about 10 miles southwest of Port-au-Prince, home to as much as a third of the country's population.

Mission of Hope Haiti, located a half-hour from the epicenter of the quake, whose facilities sustained some damage, set up a triage and command center, where a team of medical missionaries have been working round the clock to treat the injured.

The team has seen dozens of fatalities, said Mission of Hope spokeswoman Marilyn Waterman from the ministry's U.S. base in Missouri. On Wednesday, only a handful of its staff of 150 Haitian nationals had been accounted for. One young staffer, a college student, was in class when the quake hit and was trapped beneath the rubble for hours. He survived, but 20 of his classmates did not.

"Pray extremely hard," Waterman said.

She said relief supplies were being donated, and they would be distributed to various ministries they partner with through an alliance called HaitiOne. Founder Brad Johnson said a warehouse was already stocked with 1.5 million meals.

"Our staff on the ground reports that this looks really bad, but we've been here before with the hurricanes two years ago," said Johnson, founder of both Mission of Hope Haiti and HaitiOne. "We have the infrastructure in place and are prepared to serve."

The earthquake could be felt as far as Ouanaminthe, located a nine hours' drive from Port-au-Prince near the Dominican Republic border. Sheree Bowie, development director for Danita's Children/Hope for Haiti Children's Center, an orphanage and school in Ouanaminthe, said there was no damage to the ministry's facilities but the mayor asked that they close their school until Monday because of significant aftershocks that continue to be felt.

Since the earthquake struck, more than 30 aftershocks of a 4.5 magnitude or higher have rattled Haiti, according to the New York Times, making relief efforts more dangerous and leaving residents with ongoing uncertainty.

Several Christian relief groups on Wednesday were assessing the scale of destruction and planning their response. By Thursday morning, Baltimore-based World Relief had sent a disaster-response team to start emergency relief efforts, according to a statement on the ministry's Web site.

Mercy Ships, which provides medical care on hospital vessels, was meeting to determine its response. Medical and relief supplies it received were to be sent to partner ministries working in the nation.

Casey Calamusa, communications director at World Vision, said during an online blog Thursday morning that the relief organization has a staff of 70 workers and volunteers in Port-

au-Prince and is sending out 18 metric tons of supplies Thursday.

A team of crisis-trained chaplains with the Billy Graham Rapid Response Team had reached Haiti by Wednesday. Working with Samaritan's Purse, headed by Franklin Graham, they will determine how best to provide emotional and spiritual care in the aftermath of the earthquake, said Jack Munday, director of organization.

Houses fell into ravines, and schools, a hospital and government buildings collapsed Tuesday, including United Nations' offices. By Thursday morning, 160 U.N. staff still were unaccounted for in the wreckage, and 36 staffers were confirmed dead.

The city's Roman Catholic archbishop is among the dead, according to the *Miami Herald*. Several Roman Catholic Archdiocese buildings fell, including an office at the main cathedral, according to the Vatican, killing Archbishop Joseph Serge Miot and at least 100 priests and seminarians, the newspaper reported Thursday.

Haiti President Rene Preval said he feared the death toll could climb above 100,000, CNN reported. He told the *Miami Herald* the devastation was "unimaginable."

Later, on CNN, Preval lamented that injured people have been lying in the streets since the quake struck, saying, "We don't have the capacity to bring them to the hospital."

Speaking from Florida, where he traveled this week for a conference, Bishop Joel R. Jeune of Grace International church in Port-au-Prince said Wednesday there was little damage to the 16-acre compound where his ministry houses a girls' school and medical facilities. But ministers on the ground said the situation was chaotic Tuesday. "Lots of buildings collapsing, lots of screaming ... trees falling on cars, people falling down," he said.

Jeune said hundreds of survivors were making camp at the compound, located near the epicenter of the quake, where they were receiving some medical care.

But the humanitarian needs are expected to be enormous. The United States, France, China and the Dominican Republic sent search and rescue teams to Haiti, and President Obama promised \$100 million in aid to support what he called one of the largest international relief efforts in history.

Australia has pledged an initial \$10 million for the relief campaign, and the World Health Organization is deploying specialists to help handle mass casualties and corpses, according to wire reports.

According to the AP, the Baltimore-based Navy hospital ship *USNS Comfort* will leave late this weekend for Haiti. Also, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said on the *Today* show Thursday morning that troops from the Army's 82nd Airborne Division will arrive later Thursday to help patrol the streets and that the United States has sent communications equipment to the Haitian government so it can resume some level of operation.

Hope for Haiti Children's Center is preparing to take in children whose parents died in the quake or are missing in the rubble. After a rash of hurricanes devastated Haiti in 2008, the ministry saw a sharp uptick in the number of children in need of a home.

"We anticipate an influx of needs for the children of Haiti," ministry founder Danita Estrella said in an e-mail update Wednesday. "It is our prayer that our orphanage and school, as well as other orphanages in our community, can bring hope and assistance to those who need it most."

Raymond Joseph, Haiti's ambassador to the United States, said that although the air traffic control tower at the Port-au-Prince airport had been destroyed, the runway was usable for

planes carrying aid and rescue teams.

However, the main road connecting it to the capital remained impassable Thursday morning, the AP reported. Other roads had torn apart or were blocked by debris, making it difficult to transport food and relief supplies. The electricity was largely out, and communication was limited because telephones were not working.

Joseph, who is reportedly an evangelical Christian, met Wednesday morning with the Rev. Rob Schenck, president of Washington, Faith and Action, which is raising money to support relief efforts.

The ambassador said the help of Christians worldwide and the international community is needed if Haiti is to recover from the devastating quake.

"No one is tested beyond what the endurance would be; that is the message of God," Joseph said. "So I know in this hour where Haiti is being tested so hard that there is a purpose for it, and it calls for the solidarity of all Christian brothers and sisters and it calls also for the unity of the people of Haiti if as a country and those outside to get us out of this."

For a list of ministries assisting with disaster relief in Haiti, [click here](#).