

Christian Aid Organizations Respond to Haiti Quake

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

Thousands were believed to have died in the worst earthquake to hit the impoverished nation. The temblor struck just before 5 p.m. Tuesday about 10 miles southwest of Port-au-Prince and was followed by several aftershocks, including 30 of a 4.5 magnitude or higher, said Amy Vaughan, a geophysicist with the United States Geological Survey, according to the *New York Times*.

Houses fell into ravines, and schools, a hospital and government buildings collapsed, including United Nations' offices. On Wednesday morning, 100 U.N. staff were still missing, including the mission chief.

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."

"Parliament has collapsed," Preval said, according to the newspaper. "The tax office has collapsed. Schools have collapsed. Hospitals have collapsed. There are a lot of schools that have a lot of dead people in them."

Speaking from Florida, where he traveled this week for a conference, Bishop Joel R. Jeune of Grace International church in Port-au-Prince said 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. "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.

Mission of Hope Haiti, located a half-hour from the epicenter of the quake, said its missions buildings sustained some damage, but the ministry set up a triage and command center, where a team of medical missionaries were working round the clock to treat the wounded.

The team has seen dozens of fatalities, said Mission of Hope spokeswoman Marilyn Waterman from the ministry's U.S. base in Missouri. And 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. "Pray that God gives us the tools and funds that we need."

She said relief supplies were being donated, and they would be distributed to various ministries they partner with through an alliance called HaitiOne.

But the humanitarian needs are expected to be enormous. Speaking from Geneva on Wednesday, a spokesman for the International Federation of Red Cross estimated that as many as 3 million of Haiti's 9 million people may have been affected by the quake, the Associated Press reported.

Christian relief groups were still assessing the scale of destruction Wednesday and planning their response. Baltimore-based World Relief has a team of 40 on the ground and within the next day or two planned to send a team to help distribute

emergency kits containing food, blankets and water.

Mercy Ships, which provides medical care, was meeting to determine its response. Medical and relief supplies donated within the last several hours were to be sent to partner ministries working in the nation.

The United States, France, China and the Dominican Republic were all sending search and rescue teams to Haiti, the United Nations said, according to the *Washington Post*. A U.S. military official said there were tentative plans for a U.S. hospital ship to dock off the coast to assist the sick and wounded.

Raymond Alcide 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.

Though the airport had opened, the main road connecting it to the capital remained impassable Wednesday, the Associated Press 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 this 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."