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Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA)
Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean, San Jose, Costa Rica

DISASTER RESPONSE

Providing Humanitarian Assistance to Haiti after the Earthquake

A Disaster Assistance Response Team (USAID/DART) is on the ground in Haiti helping to coordinate the U.S. Government's humanitarian response to the magnitude 7.0 earthquake that struck Port-au-Prince on January 12.

The earthquake affected more than 3 million people, caused an estimated 212,000 deaths and displaced more than 700,000 residents of the Port-au-Prince metropolitan area.

As of February 10, the USG had provided more than $537 million in assistance to Haiti, including $201 million from USAID/OFDA for search and rescue, emergency response, and health activities, as well as emergency relief supplies including thousands of water containers, hygiene and kitchen sets, and shelter materials.

The U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) has contributed $234 million in support of

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Photo courtesy of the U.S. Air Force, Dennis J. Henry Jr.

Top photo: Newly appointed USAID Administrator Dr. Rajiv Shah visits earthquake victims in a hospital in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, on January 23. Below, USAID/DART leader Tim Callaghan, left, accompanies Administrator Shah to the site of urban search and rescue (USAR) operations at the collapsed Hotel Montana, at right.

Photo courtesy of the U.S. Air Force, Prentice Colter

Photo courtesy of the U.S. Navy, Laura A. Moore

DISASTER RESPONSE

USAID/OFDA Helps Colombia Combat Wildfires

Photo courtesyof the Bogotá Firefighters Corps

Colombian firefighters extinguish one of the many wildfires that plagued the country in January.

In January, USAID/OFDA provided technical assistance and funding to the Government of Colombia (GoC) to help combat hundreds of wildfires in the central and eastern region of the country.

USAID/OFDA deployed a four-person assessment team, led by fire management specialist Luisa Alfaro, to Colombia in early January to assist with the implementation of firefighting strategies.

USAID/OFDA also provided funds to purchase much-needed tools and equipment including protective clothing for firefighters, water tanks and hoses, and chainsaws, rakes, and shovels.

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

New Scholarships Announced

Florida International University (FIU), with support from USAID/OFDA, announces the availability of new "Bell Scholarships" to assist individuals from the region who are committed to careers in disaster/emergency management, obtain advanced degrees in relevant fields.

The scholarships are part of Phase V of the USAID/OFDA-funded Paul C. Bell Jr. Risk Management Program implemented by FIU.

The application/nomination deadline is March 31, 2010. For information about the requirements and process, contact Dr. Juan Pablo Sarmiento at **Juan-Pablo.Sarmiento@fiu.edu**.

Photo by Luis Acosta, AFP

A Haitian child carries a box with USAID food supplies at an internally displaced person (IDP) camp in Port-au-Prince.

Bringing Disaster Relief to Haiti

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relief efforts, including health assistance and the transportation of emergency relief personnel and commodities to Haiti, while USAID's Office of Food for Peace provided $68 million in food and nutrition assistance.

"We are focused on saving lives, alleviating suffering, and reducing the social and economic impacts of the earthquake," said USAID/DART leader Tim Callaghan, USAID/OFDA Senior Regional Advisor for Latin America and the Caribbean, who departed for Haiti on January 13 to head the 34-member DART. USAID/OFDA also activated a Washington-based Response Management Team to support the team in Haiti.

As part of the response, USAID deployed USAR teams from the Los Angeles County Fire Department in California, the Fairfax County Fire Rescue Department in Virginia, and the Miami-Dade Fire Rescue in Florida to Haiti. The U.S. rescue teams and dozens of others from countries throughout the world worked around the clock in the days following the earthquake, and rescued 135 people from collapsed buildings in affected areas. The U.S. teams also helped evaluate the structural stability of hospitals and other vital buildings in Port-au-Prince.

"The heroic efforts of the U.S. search and rescue teams would make any American proud if they had witnessed them," Callaghan said. "It was difficult, dangerous work and rescuers continued to do it for two weeks."

As part of the relief efforts, USAID/OFDA is providing funds to the U.N. World Food Programme, UNICEF, International Organization for Migration, U.N. World Health Organization, Save the Children, Food for the Hungry, U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Action Contre la Faim, U.N. Population Fund, Samaritan's Purse, CARE, and other organizations to carry out activities in affected areas.

"We are addressing the health, sanitation, and shelter needs of displaced populations in the Port-au-Prince area, as well as planning for debris removal through cash-for-work programs," Callaghan said.

"This is truly a massive effort. Everything we do is coordinated with the Government of Haiti, as well as the U.N. cluster leads and the international community, to avoid duplication of efforts and to ensure dignity for the people who have been affected by this tragedy. The Haitian people are resilient, and we are totally committed to working with the international community to help them recover," he added.

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COMING UP

DIPECHO Regional Consultation Workshop

USAID/OFDA disaster risk management specialist Sergio David Gutierrez will participate in the Regional Consultation Workshop of the Disaster Preparedness Programme of the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid Department (DIPECHO), scheduled from February 22 to 26 in Nicaragua.

INSARAG Americas Advisory Committee

USAID/OFDA is helping to organize the upcoming meeting of the Advisory Committee of the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG), Regional Group of the Americas, scheduled for March 2 to 4 in Los Angeles, California. USAID/OFDA Senior Regional Advisor Tim Callaghan, the INSARAG Americas Chairman, will preside over the meeting.

Joint Humanitarian Operations Training

USAID/OFDA military liaison officer Kate Legates plans to conduct the upcoming Joint Humanitarian Operations Course at Joint Task Force Bravo, at the Soto Cano Air Base in Honduras, from March 10 to 11. The training prepares U.S. military leaders for collaborative work with USAID during disaster response operations.

Tsunami Warning System Work Meeting

USAID/OFDA will participate in a working group meeting for the Caribbean Tsunami Early Warning System, scheduled from March 10 to 12 in Managua, Nicaragua.

DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

Forest Firefighter Brigades Mobilize

With support from USAID/OFDA, firefighter brigades from Costa Rica and Ecuador participated in mobilization exercises last month in their respective countries to improve the teams' capacities to combat forest fires.

From January 14 to 17, seventeen Costa Rican fire brigades gathered in Atenas, west of the capital, San José city, for the third annual National Forest Firefighter Brigade Mobilization Exercise.

The Ecuador mobilization exercise took place in Quito city from January 29 to 31. Approximately 200 firefighters participated in the event, organized by the Environment Ministry's National Forestry Directorate.

USAID/OFDA plans to support upcoming forest firefighter brigade mobilization exercises in Paraguay, from March 3 to 8, and Colombia, from March 12 to 14.

The USAID/OFDA Regional Disaster Assistance Program (RDAP) has provided fire management training and technical assistance in the region since the late 1990s. Since 2007, the RDAP has promoted mobilization exercises as a way to improve national capacities to mitigate and control forest fires.

Costa Rican firefighters prepare to extinguish a brush fire during the third annual mobilization exercise in January.

Photo by Manuel Ramírez, Jr., USAID/OFDA