

TRANSCRIPT

Date: 13 February 2010

Event: Press conference on relief efforts in Haiti

Location: Toussaint Louverture Airport, Port-au-Prince, Haiti

Speakers: Administrator Rajiv Shah, USAID, and General Douglas Fraser, USSOUTHCOM

USAID Administrator Rajiv Shah: We come today in partnership and in the spirit of cooperation both to mourn the tremendous loss of life and the tremendous suffering that's been incurred from this terrible tragic earthquake on its near one month anniversary.

We also come to continue our dialogue with the government of Haiti and to continue to learn what we can do to help support the people of Haiti and to help carry out President Obama's commitment to serve the people of Haiti as effectively, as swiftly, and as aggressively as possible.

We had the chance this morning to meet with President Preval and with Prime Minister Bellerive and other members of the Cabinet and continue to take their guidance and their advice and work under their direction in all of our efforts here in Haiti.

What we've seen today is that there's been a tremendous amount of progress in the past month, primarily led by Haitians and the resilience of the Haitian people, but also by the humanitarian assistance workers from around the world and from the United States.

Finally, we recognize that today is an opportunity to renew our commitment to continue to serve Haiti and the Haitian people, not just to meet immediate needs but also for the long term.

Thank you.

Now I'll introduce my colleague and partner in this effort, General Doug Fraser.

General Douglas Fraser: Thank you very much.

As Dr. Shah said, we come here at a time of mourning for the Haitian people and our hearts go out to all the people of Haiti and all those who have suffered during this disaster.

The partnership we have with the government of Haiti, with the United Nations, with MINUSTAH, with all of the U.S. government led by Dr. Shah and USAID has been instrumental in the capacities we've been able to gather here and support in Haiti.

There's really great cooperation amongst the entire international community to support the government of Haiti and the people of Haiti, and that will continue as long as that requirement is still a need.

Thank you very much.

Radio Boukman: We would like to know what you mean by long term collaboration. We would like to know something a little bit more tangible and detailed as far as what you mean by long term collaboration.

Administrator Shah: Thank you for that question.

The United States government, the United States Agency for International Development, and a number of other civilian agencies in the United States government have been present in Haiti for quite a long number of years working in health, working in agriculture, and working in a range of other structures. We have pledged to continue that commitment to Haiti at higher levels going forward and for a long time to come. Our commitment is to help Haiti rebuild.

AP: Jonathan Katz with Associated Press. General, we understand that the number of American troops here in Haiti has been reduced about 10,000 from the high water mark. We were wondering if there was going to be a continued drawdown, what we could expect to see in terms of those numbers as far as the future goes, and then what that's going to mean here on the ground in Haiti.

General Fraser: Today on the ground supporting Haiti there are roughly 13,000 U.S. military men and women supporting the efforts here in Haiti. Of that roughly 6500 are on the ground in Haiti. We brought a lot of capability, a lot of flexibility to Haiti to deal with the immediate situation. As the international aid and relief efforts have improved and increased in Haiti, we've seen an ability to transition those capabilities to other needs around the world.

I think what is important is that it is a transition. The capacity that we have here, if it is still required, will transition to other U.S. government organizations or NGOs or UN organizations. It is not an exit of capability.

So it is a transition of immediate relief capability to an enduring capacity here in Haiti.

NPR: Richard Harris, NPR. I was talking earlier in the week with the UN organization that's running the place. Right after the rains, many many people got wet here. The UN said there was shelter for about 300,000, really good tents or tarps for 300,000, and the need is for a million. And that basically the problem is not that there are tents sitting

around here, but there are tents and tarps and so on, that need to be delivered from the U.S. and elsewhere. Are there plans to expand the amount of aid that is coming from the U.S. to Haiti for things like shelter?

Administrator Shah: Yes. President Preval asked us to redouble our efforts to expand shelter assistance to Haitians and Haitian families. So we will be expanding both shipments of materials to Haiti for that purpose and expanding the distribution of shelter kits, sanitation and support for the development of safe shelters for Haitian families that have been displaced.

CNN: John Bolls, CNN. A question for either one who wants to answer. A month on, specific examples of what is now working well, specific examples of what needs to be working better, and looking ahead, where do you go from this point on? What are the immediate challenges?

You also said that you're working very closely with the Haitian government, that they're overseeing it. Again, specific examples of something that the Haitian government has been hands-on in doing that you have taken their direction on. Thank you.

Administrator Shah: It's sometimes hard to describe the successes because the needs are so tremendous. But this was the largest and most successful international search and rescue effort ever assembled in history. We've seen real progress with more than two million people served with food rations; with significant increases in water availability that meet humanitarian targets; and with health and medical interventions that range from immunization to prevent the spread of disease in the future and surgical capacities with literally thousands of surgeries being performed.

Of course it's not enough, and we're always very focused on expanding all of these efforts, but those are important milestones and important indicators of progress.

In each of those sectors, as well as in the efforts to create Cash for Work programs for rubble removal and in other areas, we're taking the direction of the government of Haiti quite specifically and very directly.

AFP: Mike Smith from AFP. You mentioned the drawdown in the numbers of troops and you mentioned a long term commitment. What does that mean? Do you have a length of time for how long that's going to last? And do you have a number of troops in mind for how many will be here for that long term commitment eventually?

General Fraser: It's important, I think, to remember that the capability and the capacity the United States military brought in was for immediate relief. As the capability here in Haiti improves and the international community as well as the government of Haiti is able to take on and sustain those capabilities and the immediate need is no longer there, the need for military forces and U.S. military forces, then it declines.

For example, here at the airport we have the capacity for 160 flights per day. We're now having about 80 flights a day; and the government of Haiti is taking over running the airport during daylight hours which was their norm for operating pre-earthquake.

We're seeing support in the food distribution and the capabilities there, and needs are going down. Needs are going down from an emergency medical capacity of post-earthquake.

So as we look toward the future we will only keep that capacity that is needed here to support U.S. government and international capabilities, and that is still an effort that's ongoing to define.

One other question was the timeframe. We are looking at it from a capacity standpoint, not necessarily a timeframe. So as capacity meets demands, then we'll look for transition.

Miami Herald: Harold Charty, Miami Herald. If you have 13,000 troops now, General Fraser, how many did you have in the immediate aftermath? Was it a larger figure or a smaller figure?

General Fraser: At the height of our capacity here within Haiti we had slightly over 20,000 military men and women here in Haiti.

Canal Plus: Baptiste Muckensturm, Canal Plus French TV. A question about reconstruction. You met this morning President Preval and I want to know what you talked about. Did you talk about reconstruction with him? And can you give us some details about the projects you have for reconstruction in Port-au-Prince particularly?

Administrator Shah: The President articulated a strategy for reconstruction, but we spent most of our time laying the groundwork for an effective reconstruction like building shelter, removing rubble, establishing jobs programs, and meeting basic needs. We remain committed to working through the reconstruction with international partners and with the government of Haiti.

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