

Press encounter with Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon; Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Alain Le Roy; Administrator of the UN Development Programme, Helen Clark; Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Edmond Mulet; Susana Malcorra, Under-Secretary-General for Field Support, and Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, Martin Nesirky

**UN Headquarters, New York, 13 January 2010
(unofficial transcript)**

SG: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. First of all, I would like to extend my heartfelt sympathies to the victims of yesterday's catastrophic earthquake in Haiti. Je suis vraiment désolé par le désastre qui vient de toucher Haïti. C'est une tragédie pour Haïti, pour le peuple Haïtien, et pour [L'Organisation des] Nations Unies.

Information on the full extent of the damage is still scanty. Initial reconnaissance and aerial assessments have been undertaken. It is now clear that the earthquake has had a devastating impact on the capital, Port-au-Prince. The remaining areas of Haiti appear to be largely unaffected.

As you are aware, buildings and infrastructure were heavily damaged throughout the capital. Basic services such as water and electricity have collapsed almost entirely.

We are yet to establish the number of dead or injured, which we fear may well be in the hundreds. Medical facilities have been inundated with injured.

There is no doubt that we are facing a major humanitarian emergency and that a major relief effort will be required.

I am grateful to those countries that are sending emergency relief. I urge all members of the international community to come to Haiti's aid in this hour of need.

Many of our UN colleagues on the ground, including my Special Representative in Haiti, Mr. [Hédi] Annabi, and his deputy, Mr. [Luiz Carlos] da Costa, are as yet unaccounted for.

The UN Headquarters at the Christopher Hotel collapsed in the quake. Many people are still trapped inside.

MINUSTAH [United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti] troops have been working through the night to reach those trapped under the rubble. So far, several badly injured casualties have been retrieved and transported to the MINUSTAH logistics base, which thankfully remains intact. No names are available yet.

MINUSTAH has around 3,000 troops and police in and around Port-au-Prince to help maintain order and assist in relief efforts. MINUSTAH engineers have also begun clearing some of the main roads in Port-Au-Prince which will allow assistance and rescuers to reach those in need. I will dispatch Assistant Secretary-General and former Special Representative of the Secretary-General to MINUSTAH, Edmond Mulet, to Haiti as soon as possible.

The UN is also mobilizing an emergency response team to help coordinate humanitarian relief efforts, which will be on the ground shortly. We will immediately release \$10 million from the Central Emergency Relief Fund (CERF). In this regard, I am encouraged and appreciative of the willingness of the international community to extend immediate assistance and rescue missions. I am in close consultation with the US Government and Haitian Government, as well as many others of the international community's major countries. In these times of difficulties, I would appeal again to the international community for urgent further assistance and urgent further help for them. Thank you very much.

Q: How is the communication with Haiti right now? Can you reach them?

SG: Most of the communications, as I understand, have broken down. But there is a very limited communications channel. We are trying to use satellite communications, but it is very difficult. But, still, we are trying to communicate with them.

Q: Mr. Secretary-General, can you say how many people in the headquarters staff there in building, in the Hotel Christopher up on the hill, are accounted for, unaccounted for? And also, there is a report that Mr. Annabi is dead; can you comment?

SG: First of all, I do not, and we do not, have any exact information. What we can assume is that the total at the time that the earthquake struck the MINUSTAH headquarter, there were around 100 or 150 people still working. They were having important meetings. We are still not aware of having any information. The Brazilian peacekeeping forces have been working all the night through to rescue, but because of the darkness, and the impact on the infrastructure, not much progress has been made. With the dawn of daytime, I am sure we will have better rescue operations.

Q: Mr. Secretary-General, are you going to meet with the Clinton Foundation, or are you sending, using your Special Envoy, Bill Clinton? Is there any news also about Michèle Montas? Is she in Haiti or is she in the United States?

SG: Yes, I have spoken with Special Envoy, President Bill Clinton, yesterday, and this morning, I am going to discuss with him again. We have agreed that both the United Nations and himself as Special Envoy for Haiti should coordinate and try our best efforts to mobilize whatever necessary assistance and rescue teams, and try to reconstruct the Haitian economy. At this time, the United Nations will do whatever possible to help the

Haitian people. The United Nations will stand firmly and continuously in coordination with the international community to help recover and overcome these difficulties.

Q: Michèle Montas, do you have any news about her?

SG: I will try to contact her.

Q: What about your Special Representative – Bill's question? What's the latest about him and any other casualties for the United Nations, sir?

SG: Mr. Annabi was having a consultation with a visiting Chinese delegation. Unfortunately, as of now, we are not able to have any confirmation about the safety of Mr. Annabi. We will do our best efforts. Again, the Deputy Special Representative is also unaccounted for, together with many of our staff. That is why I have decided to dispatch Mr. Edmond Mulet, who used to be a Special Representative, to manage this operation and [help] management of the Mission there.

And we have around 3,000 peacekeepers in and around Port-au-Prince. They will be responsible to, first of all, secure the scene and help maintain civil order and security of the city.

Q: Mr. Secretary-General, how soon do you plan on going to see the scene yourself?

SG: Myself? I am willing to visit Haiti as practicably early as possible. But at this time, I will try to dispatch Mr. Mulet. Mr. Mulet, if all the arrangements can be made, will be able to leave on Friday, or as early as possible. But for me, we have to see. First of all, I am here to save lives and to manage, to command all the operations, together with the leaders of the international community. And I will do my best, together with President Clinton, when will be the appropriate timing. But I am committed to visit, as practicably early as possible.

Q: Mr. Secretary-General, you said that several badly injured UN staffers had been pulled from the wreckage. Were there any bodies pulled from the wreckage, also? And it seems pretty clear from what you said that there are going to be some serious UN casualties. Also, could you comment on the need for heavy equipment to lift some of the rubble, because this apparently is one of the problems, not just for the UN but in Haiti and the rest of the capital?

SG: For that question, I will ask one of my senior advisors to answer. For your second question, I have been in urgent contact with the US Government and I have requested officially [for them] to provide more logistical support and heavy equipment, and trained rescue and assistance teams. And our Force Commander is in contact with the American military commander, and I will continue to coordinate with the US Government. Now, I am very much grateful to the US Government and many other governments who have expressed their willingness to dispatch urgent and immediate assistance teams. I will continue to coordinate with them.

If you excuse me, I have another important meeting, so I will have some of our senior advisers to answer further questions. Thank you very much.

Le Roy: We are just all here together to show that we are all united, because as you know in Haiti there was a very, very important peacekeeping mission, MINUSTAH, but also many other UN agencies. And so far, the main building, as far as the UN is concerned, has collapsed. It is the MINUSTAH headquarters. So far, as far as we speak, there are still over 100 people unaccounted for, under the rubble. We don't know about their fate, in answer to your question. Some people have been extracted out of the building, but only less than ten for the time being – some dead, some alive. So we don't know, for the time being, the fate of the others, but of course we are extremely, extremely concerned.

About the other question, about the heavy equipment, it is clear that of course that we have some engineers - MINUSTAH - has some engineers working to try to extract people from the rubble with heavy equipment, but of course there is a clear need for Haiti, the most urgent need is more and more search and rescue people with heavy equipment, and also for medical teams. I am sure John Holmes will comment on that in a minute.

Q: Mr. Le Roy, you say some dead, some alive, have been extracted. How many are confirmed dead?

Le Roy: For the time being the confirmed dead are less than five confirmed dead. But of course the most are still under the rubble.

Q: ..[inaudible] peacekeepers already been killed, so when you say five [inaudible]

Le Roy: Five were from the main building. But of course, there are other places where people are still trapped under the rubble. For example, in the case of UNDP, maybe you want to say a word on that?

Clark: UNDP has around 38 staff are unaccounted for, that includes local and international staff. Some of the local staff may be home. It's not possible to find them at the moment. But it is understood that about ten were in an adjacent building to our main building, and that adjacent building collapsed so we don't, at this point, have news on them.

Le Roy: The buildings that collapsed were the main MINUSTAH headquarters and also the Montana Hotel, which is the main hotel in which some of our staff were living, has also collapsed.

Q: [inaudible] number of peacekeepers?

Le Roy: No, so far, there are some relatively good news: First, the airport is fully operational. Second, the logistics base, and maybe Susana can say a word on that, the

logistical base of MINUSTAH is fully operational, with water and rations. Third, our forces – we have 3,000 forces already in Port au Prince – we have more forces of course in the country, but in Port au Prince itself we have 3,000 forces. They are there, of course, to secure of course the airport, the port, and the main buildings, and patrolling in the streets. That is already happening.

Q: You say the airport is still functioning, although the control tower has collapsed?

Le Roy: Yes, but our information from this morning, one hour ago, the airport is functioning and aircraft will arrive in the next minutes or hours.

Q: Do you know how many blue helmets have been killed?

Le Roy: We think a very limited number, a very small number, because most of them, their building has not collapsed, and they are still.... Some, of course, were inside the main building, but a very limited number.

Q: Then you can't confirm the number of Chinese, or Jordanians, or Brazilian peacekeepers who were killed?

Le Roy: No we cannot confirm.

Q: [inaudible]

Le Roy: Maybe Edmond, who knows Haiti very well...

Mulet: The Deputy Force commander, Gen. Toro from Chile, had an air reconnaissance this morning, and he was able to confirm that many important buildings in Port au Prince have collapsed, and are damaged, including the National Palace, the National Assembly building, the Montana Hotel, our own headquarters in the Christopher Hotel, many, many ministries also, many private residences and buildings. So you can understand the situation, the rubble on the streets, so access to many of these places is really, really difficult. As Mr. Le Roy mentioned, the Brazilian engineering company is doing whatever they can in order to access these places at this point.

Q: We can expect bigger numbers to come in the next few days or hours. Is OCHA planning a flash appeal to deal with this?

Holmes: Just to tell you a few words about the humanitarian side. Obviously, we are extremely concerned by the fate of the general population of Port au Prince and maybe areas outside Port au Prince. We are mobilizing every effort we can to start the humanitarian operation. The first priority is search and rescue, because many people, not just in the UN buildings but elsewhere are trapped inside the rubble. We know that there are search and rescue teams on the way, or w

that, obviously, the usual priorities will be there in terms of clean water, food and shelter for the population who are obviously in a state of shock. We are already putting in a UN disaster and assessment and coordination team on the ground. Some of those members of the team will be there today, as well as a search and rescue mission. We will be launching a flash appeal, probably in two or three days' time. Obviously we can't put any figures on that at this stage, but certainly it will be a major operation, and a major relief effort from what we can see. As the Secretary-General has said, we are already releasing at least \$10 million from CERF to kick start the operation.

Q: staff members of UNDP and UNICEF. Can you give similar numbers?

Holmes: Well, as far as we know, obviously a lot of buildings were damaged, but our information suggests that for the most part, the staff at WFP, UNICEF, WHO, other humanitarian organizations, including OCHA, my own staff there, they are ok, they are safe. Not necessarily all of them, but in general, reasonably intact, so we can kick start the operations by the people we already have on the ground, as well as of course what we will be bringing in from outside. I think the World Food Programme is already sending in 90 metric tonnes of high energy biscuits to start the process off.

Q: The Christopher Hotel, do you feel it was one of the best constructed or safest buildings in Port au Prince? Maybe DSS, was it MOSS compliant, things like that?

Mulet: This is one of the most important buildings in Port au Prince, a very solid concrete building. As we have seen on TV, many other buildings, including the National Palace, were severely damaged. So I believe that this Christopher Hotel building, our headquarters, were right on the fault, or on the path of the main earthquake.

Q: Inaudible

Holmes: We hope to have a couple of people, extra people, on the ground today, and the rest of the members – a five or six member team – probably tomorrow. But as I said, we already have an office there. We have a humanitarian coordinator there. The agencies are already present. So we have quite a significant presence on the ground. We will be reinforcing it from outside – from the Dominican Republic and elsewhere – as quickly as we can

Q: [inaudible]

Holmes: Well, we know at least one hospital has collapsed; others have been damaged. I think one of the major needs, I should have mentioned actually, is of course for medical teams and medical supplies for those injured and for those coming out from under the rubble. That is another major problem there. I think the medical infrastructure, the medical services have been very badly damaged, and we are going to need a lot of help with that from the outside too.

Q: [inaudible]

Holmes: I have seen the media reports of dead bodies, but I can't really add to that. We don't have any specific information about the number of casualties. Clearly, some parts of the city have been very badly affected. Other parts have been relatively untouched. So it is a very mixed picture as always in these situations.

Q: from Dominican Republic?

Holmes: They are hoping to get in by air. Obviously, we will use the airport as much as we can because it will be quicker.

Q: ...major hospitals in the city, the one that there are reports has collapsed?

Holmes: I believe so. It was a Level I hospital, I think, but I don't have any details.

Q: How are you communicating with staff?

Holmes: We established contact, as somebody said already, the MINUSTAH logistics base is intact and operating. We were able to have a video conference with them this morning, by satellite link, so we have been able to establish good contact with them this morning.

Q: effect liaison with American military to send aid from some of their nearby bases, particularly Guantanamo, which is right across the strait from Port au Prince, or from their even larger base in [inaudible].

Holmes: We have been in touch with the US administration, including the military. They are mobilizing their assets as quickly as they can, particularly on the search and rescue side, so I think you can take it for granted that there will be a major US effort. Not only a US effort, but particularly from there.

Q: [inaudible]

Le Roy: Public order is ok for the time being. This morning it is correct for the time being.

Q: Is there a functioning government in the country?

Le Roy: We know that President Preval is alive, although the Presidential Palace was heavily damaged. We are starting contact with the government, but of course, even for them it is difficult to get information from all over the country, because communications, even for them, are completely damaged.

Q: [inaudible]

Le Roy: The acting SRSG contacted the President's Palace, where they were able to talk to the Chief of Security of President Preval, and President Preval was there, and alive. We can confirm he is alive, yes.

Q: ...role in maintaining public order. What was it before, and does it change after the earthquake? What exactly will be their role?

Le Roy: For the time being, their main task now is to secure the main facilities at the airport, port, the UN buildings of course, and also patrolling in the city to protect the main buildings. As I said, we have 3,000 peacekeepers in Port au Prince, so that is their task for the time being.

Nesirky: On Michèle Montas, obviously we are also very concerned about Michèle. We think she was in Port au Prince. We do not know for sure. We have not been able to contact her so far. It was one of the first things that I tried to do yesterday afternoon.