

**Remarks by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon at
press encounter on Haiti
New York**

**15 January 2010
(full transcript)**

Good morning.

I'd like to make three brief points.

First, the general picture. Reports on the extent of the devastation in Haiti are still coming in, each seemingly worse than the last.

Preliminary estimates from our UN emergency teams show widespread damage to infrastructure in Port au Prince and other affected areas, with as many as 50 percent of buildings in the worst-hit areas damaged or destroyed.

A high proportion of the 3 million people in the capital area are without access to food, water, shelter and electricity.

We are still in the search and rescue phase, and we are trying to save as many lives as possible.

A major humanitarian effort is now well underway. Although it is inevitably slower and more difficult than any of us would wish, we are mobilizing all resources as fast as we possibly can.

A UN operations center has been established at the Port au Prince airport, staffed by members of the UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination Team, and is now coordinating the search and rescue efforts of 27 teams that have arrived from countries around the world.

Aid flights arrived through the night and will continue through the day.

Search and rescue remains a monumental effort. Heavy lifting equipment is still urgently needed.

Distribution of food and medical supplies has begun in Port au Prince, supplemented increasingly by the aid beginning to arrive from the outside.

Logistics are extremely difficult. The airport is open, as you know, but capacity is limited. A lack of transport and fuel is also hampering efforts. Many roads remain blocked.

That said, the international community's response has been generous and robust, and we are gearing up rapidly and effectively despite the challenging circumstances.

This afternoon the UN will launch an emergency flash appeal for around \$550 million. Most of this money will go to urgent needs: food and water are in critically short supply.

Given the number of people in the streets, without homes, we must provide shelter — we need tents, and more tents.

We urgently need medical supplies and, even more, emergency medical personnel.

The World Food Program began operations yesterday and right now is feeding around 8,000 people several times a day. Obviously, that is only a drop in the bucket in the face of the massive need, but the agency will be scaling up to feed approximately 1 million people within 15 days and 2 million people within a month.

Right now, we are establishing 15 food distribution centers in Port au Prince. Provisions will be basic: high-energy biscuits and ready-to-eat meals that require no preparation.

Second, casualty figures.

We cannot do more than guess at the total dead and injured. You have seen the various estimates. There is no point in my speculating further.

I expect a fuller report from the mission shortly, and we will update you at that time. My Spokesperson will get back to you later.

I will meet with our Haitian staff today and plan to meet all Headquarters staff very soon, next week.

Third, my Acting Special Representative, Edmond Mulet, met with President [René] Préval and the Prime Minister of Haiti upon his arrival yesterday and has assumed full control over the mission.

I am also dispatching Assistant Secretary General Tony Banbury, in our office of field operations, to Haiti to serve as Mr. Mulet's principal deputy SRSO.

I myself will go to Haiti very soon, both to show solidarity with the people of Haiti and our UN staff and to assess the situation for myself.

Lastly, let me say once again to the people of Haiti: [in French and English] We are with you. I ask your patience and salute your fortitude and courage in these terrible circumstances. Thank you very much.

Q: Mr. Secretary-General, first, is there any update on the search and rescue and UN headquarters? And, secondly, there have been some reports of looting and I wonder how concerned you are about the possibilities of frustration spilling into violence?

SG: On the first question about search and rescue operations of UN staff buried under the rubble, I expect that my Spokesperson will get back to you as soon as possible. For the second question, the UN peacekeeping operations and police, in close coordination with the Haitian police, are now taking charge of law and order in the city. But I suspect there will be some frustrations felt by the general population. We are very much concerned about that kind of possibility and are taking all possible precautionary measures. Until now, I think we have so far not seen major problems, but we will always be alert on that.

Q: Mr. Secretary-General, please, we have all seen pictures of bodies piling up in the streets of Haiti and I was wondering whether the UN is trying to help, by any chance, on this particular issue, considering the possible consequences of diseases and other issues?

SG: That is also a concern of all the international community, particularly the United Nations. We are closely coordinating with all the countries who have sent their aid teams, through Mr. [Edmond] Mulet's leadership. I know that this is a very difficult situation at this time. The Haitian Government is also paying great attention to this. We will do whatever we can at this time. I know that there is frustration, there is a possibility of disease spreading; that is the point where we are paying extreme caution and preparations for that.

Q: Thank you Mr. Secretary-General, a follow-up question. We know that soon there will be a curfew and the UN forces will probably have to enforce that, and there was an official here saying that the UN was looking for political support to actually enforce the curfew, if needed. How are you working with the Haitian Government and are they helpful to the UN?

SG: On that, I have to be advised by Special Representative Edmond Mulet. He is now in charge and he is closely coordinating with President Préval and the Haitian team and he is going to meet with the ambassadors of key countries, including the United States. Therefore, on this very specific question of enforcing a curfew, we will get back to you later.

Q: How likely is the UN to bring in more peacekeepers to stabilize the city?

SG: We have 7,000 peacekeepers in Haiti and 2,000 police, and as I told you yesterday, we have 3,000 in and around this city. Therefore, we will try to manage this situation with the current existing forces. But there may be more necessity for police, for any possible disruptions of order. But all this kind of detailed matters we will have to assess as the situation develops. It is too early to tell you at this time.

Q: You said yesterday that the first 72 hours of rescue were the crucial ones, but UN officials yesterday were also saying that probably very shortly they would have to turn from search and rescue to recovery of bodies. Can we assume that, by the end of today that decision might be taken?

SG: Seventy-two hours will fall around 5:00 p.m. today. The search and rescue operations are going on in an expedited way. We will be able to have some more information – that is why I am asking you to be a little more patient, so that the Spokesperson will get back to you and you will have [another] briefing by John Holmes this afternoon.

Q: Can I ask you to clarify your initial remark – you said, I believe, that 50% of the affected areas have been destroyed. Does that mean 50% of Port au Prince has been destroyed, or is not the whole city affected?

SG: I mean the city itself - Port au Prince.

Q: Two things, Mr. Secretary-General. One: how would you say that the coordination effort is working; is this a coordinated effort? And: two, to what extent is that the case and Mulet really is able to move the pieces and direct things and people are acceding to the UN as in charge? And also, I think it was Mr. [David] Wimhurst who said yesterday via videoconference, that the Haitian police had largely disappeared. You mentioned that they were working with the UN to enforce order. Have they been reconstituted, or what is your view of this, of the state of the police?

SG: You should understand that we are still less than 3 full days after this earthquake struck. The situation has been quite dramatic - beyond control and beyond imagination – and the assistance and solidarity has been significant. This situation has been quite overwhelming. In that regard, we should at least be more patient and more understanding about what is happening. But considering this very chaotic situation, I think the coordination has been maintained. Now with leadership established and a management team has been established, we will have a more coordinated way of managing the situation. First come to save lives, while providing humanitarian assistance. This assistance has been coming from all around the world. At the same time, there is clearly some lack of coordination. The roads are still not all open and there are some problems in delivering the assistance materials. But as time goes by, I am sure that we will be more coordinated.

Q: And my question about the police?

SG: The police? The Haitian Government is now regrouping the police, and largely UN peacekeepers have been taking control of these operations. But we are very closely coordinating with the Haitian Government.

Q: I was going to ask the same question. Have the police shown up yet, because it seemed as they were going home to their families – the Haitian police? Secondly, I'm

not sure how you can have curfew when the homeless are sleeping in the streets and the bodies are still there.

SG: I think I have answered the first question. Now about this curfew, we will come back with more detailed information about the situation there. You have seen all the images on TVs, therefore I don't need to make any further comment on that.

Q: Mr. Secretary-General, in light of the flash appeal - \$550 million flash appeal – the announcement by US President Barack Obama of \$100 million in instant aid – is that counted towards that? Is that going to be coordinated through the UN? And, relatedly, I wanted to know, a former UN official Pierre Schori, as well as some OAS [Organization of American States] officials, have said that there should be a watchdog for how the aid is channeled. Is that something that the UN is considering – what do you think of that idea?

SG: We will see, first of all, how the individual countries' pledges will be, including the case of the United States which has already been announced by President Obama. That is the decision of any sovereign government, whether this money will be used and pledged to CERF [Central Emergency Response Fund], this flash appeal, or if they will make additional contributions; that is up to the individual countries. And for that, there needs to be some transparency as well as accountability on how this money should be effectively and properly used. That we will discuss later.

Q: Mr. Secretary-General, you said you were going to go to Haiti as soon as possible. You also said that you are going to be meeting with the staff early next week. Can we presume that you will not be leaving until Tuesday at the earliest, or do you have a date in mind? Are you taking President Bill Clinton with you? And, lastly, when do you think the donor countries will be meeting on Haiti?

SG: So many questions at one time! For the exact timing of my visit to Haiti – that will be very soon. So I am sure that the Spokesperson will coordinate with you in due course, maybe today or so. Who will be going with me -- that I have not yet decided. This is the decision that I made upon the recommendation of Mr. Mulet, who only arrived yesterday. And I am planning to have a staff meeting with Headquarters staff [in New York] very soon, early next week.

Q: When will you be leaving?

SG: That, we will let you know.

Q: You said equipment is needed. Do you mean that there is a lack of heavy lifting equipment? Because we have seen yesterday problems with children trapped under the rubble. They couldn't work – taking [people] out, because they didn't have this equipment. This is a big problem.

SG: These are items which we need, in fact, like transport helicopters, water, food, medical supplies and also heavy equipment to be used for search and rescue. All this

heavy equipment sometimes experience difficulty in being transported to the scene because, normally, these destroyed areas are on high, hilly areas. Roads are not repaired, so there are a lot of difficulties at this time, but we need all these tents and many basic items are much needed. Thank you very much.