

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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**PRESS ENCOUNTER AFTER BRIEFING MEMBER STATES ON THE
SITUATION IN HAITI**

New York, 13 January 2010

Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you for your patience waiting for me. The General Assembly took much longer than expected.

I have just briefed the Member States on the situation in Haiti in the aftermath of this horrendous earthquake.

I was very much moved by such an outpouring of sympathy and solidarity from the Member States.

As you know, former President Bill Clinton, Special Envoy of the United Nations on Haiti, was with me.

His outstanding work in Haiti is known to us all. He wanted to join us immediately to see what we can do, together, to help overcome this latest disaster.

Many continue to be trapped inside the UN headquarters and other buildings, including Special Representative Hédi Annabi and his deputy, Luiz Carlos da Costa.

I would like at this time give you a sad update on the number of UN casualties. A total of 16 UN staff are now confirmed as dead. Three Jordanian police officers, one Argentinian and one Chadian police officer, and eleven Brazilian peacekeepers.

Peacekeepers and civilian staff from many Member States remain unaccounted for.

Looking to the immediate future, I want to make three quick points.

First, I am dispatching Assistant Secretary-General Edmond Mulet, as I told you this morning, to Haiti this evening. He will be on the ground tomorrow morning to assume full command of the UN Mission at this critical juncture, and to direct our immediate emergency response.

Second, the most urgent need is emergency search and rescue. People buried under the rubble are still alive. We must save them, as many as possible, and we must move immediately.

A Chinese search and rescue team, and at least two U.S. teams, should have arrived by this evening, and two more tomorrow. And I was told by many Member States during

the General Assembly that many countries are immediately sending search and rescue teams, aircraft assets, mobile hospitals and other humanitarian items which are crucially needed at this time.

As I say, these early hours and days of the emergency will be critical.

I have directed the United Nation's humanitarian agencies to mobilize swiftly and in close coordination with the international community.

Third, in the next few days, we will issue a flash appeal. I sincerely hope that Member States will respond generously.

In the meantime, as I told you this morning, I have already ordered \$10 million to be released from the Central Emergency Response Fund, to kick-start our response.

I have spoken this afternoon with President [Barack] Obama of the United States, and he assured me that the U.S. Government will deploy all possible available resources to help overcome this crisis. I will continue to be in touch with other international partners to make sure that our response is quick and effective.

Above all, our response must be coordinated, well-coordinated.

As President Clinton told the General Assembly just now, people need food, water, shelter. We need to find those who are buried in the rubble.

For those efforts to be effective, someone has to coordinate them. And that must be our UN team on the ground.

Looking ahead, we can remain hopeful for the future.

Not long ago, as you may remember, President Clinton and I visited Haiti. We saw the resilience of the people of Haiti, and the dedication of the men and women of the United Nations.

That commitment and solidarity are needed now more than ever.

To the people of Haiti, I say this: we are with you.

We are working quickly -- as fast as humanly possible. Thank you very much.

Q: Mr. Secretary-General, we understand that you are not going straight away because of the search and rescue operation, that you don't want to be in the way. But when do you think, feasibly, that you and President Clinton will be going there? And, during your conversation with President Clinton, did you reach other steps besides the ones you mentioned? Did you have other plans in the future to deal with this dire situation in Haiti?

SG: First of all, I hope Mr. Edmond Mulet will assess the situation once he is on the ground. Then we will decide when it will be appropriate for me and for other senior envoys, like President Clinton, to visit in person. But, at this time, I do not want to create any additional burdens to the ongoing rescue and search operations. When this access is critically necessary, we would not want to pull all these necessary assets, which needs to be used for other immediate humanitarian assistance to save lives. Then we have discussed, first of all, in the immediate few days, what needs to be done. I think the United Nations will continue to monitor, as well as coordinate, the international assistance, and civilian NGOs [non-governmental organizations], volunteers who will be coming to Haiti - that coordinating all this will also be very important, not to waste or delay any urgent humanitarian assistance. This is something that we have learnt during the time of the tsunami - that without [good] coordination among the agencies, NGO and government teams, sometimes this may be delayed and wasted. So this is a very important lesson, which I and President Clinton have experienced during the time of the tsunami.

Q: Mr. Secretary-General. There are a lot of organizations outside of the UN system who want to go to Haiti and help people there. How will it be organized or coordinated within the US or in other countries, before they go to Haiti? My second question is, how will you use President Clinton's assets, I mean his popularity, to raise more awareness and funds for this crisis?

SG: The first question I have already answered. I have designated Edmond Mulet, who will be in charge of all these operations. He should be the central figure to coordinate international aid and humanitarian assistance. President Clinton has had wide and many experiences. He told me that, during the last three decades, he has had this experience - as Governor, as President of the United States and as former President, particularly, most recently, during the time of the tsunami. He has been very effective in mobilizing and coordinating international aid, and I have asked him to look [at] plans for medium- and long-term reconstruction of the economy and social reconstruction of the country. We will have a flash appeal, I hope, on Friday also. Then, after that, after the immediate humanitarian assistance period is over, we will have to have a donors' conference to plan for medium and longer term reconstruction of the society.

Q: Mr. Secretary-General, have you contacted President [Rene] Préval and asked him why he said Mr. [Hedi] Annabi is dead. And also, since Mr. Clinton is not here, what does this mean for his efforts for the economic development of Haiti?

SG: I have been trying to contact him again, from early this morning. I have only been able to speak with the Ambassador here - the Permanent Representative - and he has been trying to arrange my telephone talk with President Préval. But it has not been possible yet. I was just told, about ten minutes ago by the Ambassador, that he has not been able to communicate, because of the very difficult communications system, but I am trying to reach him as soon as possible.

Q: What about Mr. Annabi, Sir? Are you still worried about him: What about the fate of your Representative in Haiti, Sir? What is the last word?

SG: I know that you have seen the reports quoting President Préval that he might have been killed. We have been trying to confirm this news through our Mission in Haiti and through the Permanent Mission of Haiti [to the UN] here, but neither of these two institutions has been able to confirm. Therefore we will continue to monitor the situation. It is not yet confirmed. That is what I can tell you at this time.

Q: What kind of day has it been for you, and for everyone in this building, knowing that you have been through a lot of crises, but never one when quite so many UN staff members are missing, so what has it meant today in this building on an emotional level?

SG: I'm sorry to tell you that we can not have an exact account for the safety of our UN staff. We know that 48 people of UNDP and UNIFEM, WFP and all other people have been mission, have not been accounted for. It is our estimate that around 100 people were still working inside the building of the MINUSTAH Headquarters at the time this earthquake struck, and therefore it will be in the range of 100-150 - I am quite concerned about that. As search and rescue teams are arriving this afternoon, I expect that more information will be available.

Thank you very much for your support and I will keep you posted tomorrow again.

Q: When will we see more action?

SG: You may understand the situation, circumstances in Haiti on the ground. There is a very serious problem of infrastructure and there is an access problem. There is a lack of heavy equipment which can be used in searching and rescuing the people under the debris. Therefore the situation seems to be very tough. With all this heavy equipment arriving from Member States, I am sure that we will be able to expedite our process of rescuing [people].

Thank you very much.