

# Information bulletin



International Federation  
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

## Haiti: School collapse

Information bulletin n° 1  
9 November, 2008

This bulletin is being issued for information only. A three story school collapsed in Petionville, Haiti on Friday, 7 November 2008. The death toll has reached 90 people on 8 November, many of them children.

Early coordination response between the Red Cross Red Crescent partners enabled the evacuation of more than 20 people and the handling of 25 dead victims.

The Haitian National Red Cross Society (HNRCS), with the support of the International Federation, have determined that external assistance is not required, and is therefore not seeking funding or other assistance from donors at this time.



Haitian National Red Cross Society volunteers evacuating the injured.  
Source: AFP

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## The Situation

On the morning of 7 November 2008 a church school on the outskirts of Port-au-Prince collapsed, burying hundreds of people, most of them children. The majority of the students attending the school range from the ages of 10 to 20 years old. Haitian officials informed more than 90 dead bodies have been recovered and at least 150 have been evacuated with serious injuries. The injured were taken to the only open hospital in Port-au-Prince: Trinite Hospital. The other two hospitals have been shut down due to worker strikes.

The overall operation is being coordinated by the Haitian Civil Protection Unit with the support of the international community. From 7 to 8 November, a team of French fire-fighters from Martinique worked through the night in collaboration with Haitian authorities; searching and trying to rescue victims trapped beneath huge slabs of cement. Bodies were found in various classrooms but at about 12:00 in the afternoon, they rescued two little children alive.

At about 1:00 pm (8 November) a US rescue team took over from the French. An hour after the transition, the American team started protecting the site to prevent any further collapse of the building and of neighbouring houses before continuing with the search and rescue operation through the rubble.

The International Federation, the Haitian National Red Cross Society, members of the UN Haiti peacekeeping force (MINUSTAH), other humanitarian organizations including Doctors without Borders and the United Nations System in Haiti joined in the rescue, in support to the Haitian authorities.

Many humanitarian organizations present in the country and rescue workers from different countries have been providing medical assistance and have been assisting in the search for survivors. Haitian rescue crews were

aided by American and French government personnel. A Disaster Assistance Response Team from the U.S. Agency for International Development arrived to assist in the search and rescue of the victims. Most of the rescue workers have been digging through the rubble with their bare hands. Heavy search and rescue equipment is needed for this kind of emergency. The Haitian president has mobilized all the resources available to rescue all those who can be saved.

This disaster occurred as the country has been struggling to recover from several major tropical storms and hurricanes that have affected thousands of people and destroyed more than half of their crops during the past few months. This emergency is an additional strain on the government resources as well as on the HNRCS.

Rescue workers have been working arduously. Search and rescue operations are on-going through the debris of the *La Promesse* school, and this activity is expected to continue at least until Sunday night. Five medical teams consisting of four from MINUSTAH and one from Doctors Without Borders are present on the ground. MINUSTAH is providing logistic support to the overall operation and assisting the Haitian National Police to clear up the area. Furthermore, the above-mentioned four MINUSTAH medical teams have been evacuating the victims. The international NGO AVSI, supported by UNICEF, is providing psychosocial activities in the area.



Residents search for survivors through the rubble. Source: Reuters

## Red Cross and Red Crescent action

Since the onset of the disaster, the International Federation and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) present in the country offered the Haitian National Red Cross Society (HNRCS) all available resources including vehicles and specialized personnel.

The HNRCS mobilized volunteers and all available ambulances to the disaster area in Petionville to perform search and rescue activities. The International Federation representative and the ICRC organized with the HNRCS a triage area 100 meters from the disaster scene. The triage area evaluated the victims to be immediately dispatched to the nearest hospital operated by Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF).

A basic pharmacy was set up and managed by the ICRC medical staff within the triage area. The Red Cross volunteers already present in the area were assisted by the American Red Cross HoD and by a Canadian Red Cross nurse. Roles have been assigned to organize the morgue (American Red Cross) and to coordinate with the local authorities for future identification of the victims. The Canadian Red Cross supported the two Haitian doctors on the scene. In addition, the Spanish Red Cross provided a vehicle to support the operation. The HNRCS successfully took care of almost all medical evacuations supported by the ICRC. The RC/RC partners evacuated more than 20 victims and handled more than 25 dead bodies.

ICRC and the HNRCS have set-up a temporary space to provide support to the victims' families and to facilitate information collection with regards to the identity and location of victims. The emergency is currently being handled by the HNRCS and the International Federation will continue to support with logistical resources if needed.

## How we work

*All International Federation assistance seeks to adhere to the [Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations \(NGO's\) in Disaster Relief](#) and is committed to the [Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response \(Sphere\)](#) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable.*

The International Federation's activities are aligned with its Global Agenda, which sets out four broad goals to meet the Federation's mission to "improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity".

### Global Agenda Goals:

- Reduce the numbers of deaths, injuries and impact from disasters.
- Reduce the number of deaths, illnesses and impact from diseases and public health emergencies.
- Increase local community, civil society and Red Cross Red Crescent capacity to address the most urgent situations of vulnerability.
- Reduce intolerance, discrimination and social exclusion and promote respect for diversity and human dignity.

## Contact information

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