



TELECOMS SANS FRONTIÈRES
+33 (0)5 59 84 43 60 - +33 (0)5 59 84 43 58
communication@tsfi.org
www.tsfi.org

EARTHQUAKE IN HAITI TSF REINFORCES ITS TEAMS

TSF Headquarters, January 18th, 2009 –

This mission is supported by the European's Commission Humanitarian Aid Department.

Responding to the devastating earthquake in Haiti, which left a widespread damage and thousands of deaths and missing people still trapped in rubble, a second TSF team, deployed from TSF headquarters in Pau, arrived in Port-au-Prince to reinforce the first team in the field since Wednesday.

Flying with a UN rescue aircraft from Santo Domingo, the second team of TSF experts landed at the airport of Port-au-Prince on January 15th, 11:30 am local time. They carried further fixed and mobile satellite telecommunications tools.

At the very beginning of the mission, TSF installed reliable and durable connections for local authorities and emergency responders. TSF's support in emergency telecoms was requested by UNICEF and by the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination teams (UNDAC).

The airport gathers a great part of emergency operations, with individual organizations coordinating their efforts in order to respond as soon as possible to immediate needs (search and rescue, medical services and supplies, clean water and sanitation, emergency shelter, food, logistics and telecommunications).

After their arrival, TSF experts immediately installed a satellite connection mostly dedicated to UNDAC teams and to emergency responders.

TSF experts have been setting up multiple broadband access points (internet connections and phone lines) in the coordinating and logistics centres located near the airport.

At the same time, TSF teams are providing IT support to the Minustah (United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti). This complex, located close to the airport, gathers all United Nations agencies and NGOs as well. Due to the capacity issue there, TSF is planning to open a telecom centre dedicated to NGOs.

Thanks to TSF, Haitian government coordinating offices are also connected to the outside world and can coordinate the emergency responses thanks to fixed and mobile connections.

They also aim at opening TSF long-term emergency telecom centres to the benefit of the entire humanitarian community.

On January 16th, TSF started running humanitarian calling operations. A phoning centre was opened in Saint-Pierre square, located in Petion-ville district in Port-au-Prince. Today, two centres are established in the district of Boyer and to Sylvio Cator Stadium.

The first days of the calling operations reveals that Haitian community is very important abroad (100% of the calls were international), and especially in the United States (95% of those calls). In this desperate situation, giving affected people a link with the outside world is vital and the possibility to reassure their loved ones only with one single sentence "I am alive" is essential for them, as a Haitian student told us on the ground:

When the earthquake struck Haiti on Tuesday January, 12th, Vilemé Emmanuel, student, was fortunately outside. He first thought that it was an explosion, with such a loud noise. But, when he saw building collapsing, including a church, he understood that it was an earthquake. People began running and crying. Thanks to the free call provided by TSF, he could call his brother in the United States, in Massachusetts, to reassure him about his situation and his father's, safe and sound as well.

Humanitarian calling operations allow affected populations to reassure their loved one but also to ask for personalized assistance:

Cherisca Ronald was in his house when the earthquake began striking, he was watching the television. After the first tremors, he began running outside. Tremors went stronger and stronger. Everything collapsed around him, his house was destroyed and above all, his friends and family died in this disaster. The call offered by TSF allowed him to call his father in Boston and to ask him for money to survive.

Fixed phones lines are severely damaged and there is no electricity, no water supply. Access to people in need remains very difficult due to debris and obstacles on the roads and traffic congestion. Populations are gathering in open spaces. Within this context, the death toll, still unknown, is expected to be high.

TSF teams will continue their operations through the affected region struck by the disaster in order to respond to the population's needs in the whole zone.

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About Télécoms Sans Frontières

Télécoms Sans Frontières: the leading humanitarian NGO specialised in emergency telecommunications

With its 24-hour monitoring centre and relying on its operational bases in Europe, Central America and Asia, Télécoms Sans Frontières (TSF) crews of IT and telecoms specialists can intervene anywhere in the world in less than 24 hours. After a sudden onset disaster or conflict, they can set up in a matter of minutes a satellite-based telecoms centre offering broadband Internet, phone and fax lines. These centres enable emergency NGOs, the United Nations and local authorities

to communicate right at the heart of a crisis. They also facilitate the coordination of aid efforts. In parallel, TSF runs humanitarian calling operation to offer support and assistance to affected civilians, giving them a link with the outside world from which they would be otherwise completely cut off.

Beyond emergencies, TSF is also involved in long term prevention and development projects that offer sustainable solutions to benefit local associations and structures in the most isolated and vulnerable communities.

Since its creation in 1998, TSF deployed to nearly 60 countries and assisted almost 500 relief organisations and millions of victims. In 2006, TSF became a partner of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF). TSF is First Responder of the Emergency Telecommunications Cluster (ETC).

Télécoms Sans Frontières is also a working group member of the United Nations emergency telecoms body (WGET). TSF is a partner of the Humanitarian Aid Department of the European Commission (ECHO) and a member of the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA).

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