

February 25, 2010

HOHAYE Was There Just in Time

By Hertz Clyde Dézir

(CHICAGO) -- By now, the presence of the international media in Haiti is quickly diminishing while the aftermath of the earthquake continues to impact the lives of several hundred thousands of survivors. Just recently, President René Préval stated that 900,000 people were still in need of tents. Overall, more than one million Haitians have become homeless as a result of the earthquake that occurred on Jan. 12.

One hour before the disaster, Pastor Franco Valdémair arrived in Haiti for a 14-day trip. "On Tuesday January 12, 2010 at 4:53 PM I was in front of Toussaint Louverture Airport ... waiting for my brother, Père Val, to pick me up when the earthquake decapitated my beloved country, which was already on its knees due to many silent quakes that shook the peaceful citizens of this country," Pastor Valdémair wrote on Hope for Haitian Youth and Elderly's Web site.

During a visit in Mexico for a CARICOM summit, the Haitian president said the quake claimed 300, 000 lives.

Despite of all the deaths and destructions, Pastor Valdémair decided that he would not return to Chicago earlier than expected; instead, he wound up helping in the humanitarian efforts on behalf of HOHAYE. Through him and a four-member committee, the non-profit organization gave away clothes, toiletries; tooth pastes, tooth brushes, and medicine that benefited many among a group of 600 survivors who were stationed in La Plaine "under self made tents."

More than a month after the devastation, Pastor Valdémair hasn't stopped urging people in Chicago and its neighboring areas to keep the momentum in terms of their generosity during this time of crisis. The needs are still overwhelming as thousands struggle to find shelter along with basic items to which they don't have access for the most part.

In the short term, HOHAYE remains committed to assist the 600 victims whom it helped initially. For instance, last Sunday the organization fed them, according to Pastor Valdémair; it will feed them again this Sunday. Through its short term interventions, the non-profit organization will ensure they receive medical care, temporary shelter and keep the food program, among other things.

The rainy season will be upon Haiti within a few weeks; in normal circumstances, a few hours of rain can be disturbing due mostly to poor infrastructures and the rampant degradation of the environment. Thus, shelter remains a key necessity that needs to be resolved before April when people expect a lot rain. The other essentials that go along with shelter can't wait either.

HOHAYE is planning another trip to Haiti soon in which Pastor Vald mar and other representatives of the organization will go to pursue what has been started in January at an even greater scale. The association counts on its active members and the generosity of all concerned people to provide sanitary kits, clothes, food items, bottled water, soaps, tents and the like. In the meantime, financial gifts remain a key option for those who find that more convenient to them.

In the long run, HOHAYE will establish a Christian academy in Haiti that will go from kindergarten all the way to college, according to Pastor Vald mar. He's been concerned about the lack of quality education in Haiti for a long time – way before the quake. That preoccupation has become even greater over the last few weeks. Such a project will cost a huge amount of money as well as human resources at different levels. By all means, HOHAYE is incapable to achieve that goal by itself; so, the organization is urging everyone join forces with it to make that goal a reality. The Christian academy will also create a program to train teachers to compensate, to some extent, for the loss of those who were killed in the wake of the earthquake.

The school system took a big hit as a result of the recent devastations; in the affected areas 80 percent of the schools were either destroyed or damaged. During a recent interview on Radio M tropole, Pierre Michel Laguerre, general director of Haiti's Ministry of Education, stated that 541 teachers and 189 staff members were killed. In this context HOHAYE has decided that it should play an instrumental role in rebuilding the earthquake-stricken island.

Please, check HOHAYE's Web site (www.hohaye.org) for earthquake pictures and further information.