

Haiti

As I write this briefing, we continue to monitor the aftermath of the tragic earthquake in Haiti. According to the UN Mission in Haiti, the earthquake has caused major damage in the Port-au-Prince area, as well as in Jacmel. The National Palace, the Cathedral, the Ministry of Justice and other important government offices have been destroyed. Hotels, schools and the national penitentiary have all suffered extensive damage. Fearful of houses collapsing, or of a second quake, many are sleeping in the streets. Electricity supplies have been severely interrupted; water is in short supply. Casualties, at this point, can only be estimated.

Our sisters and UN staff on the ground are doing their best to help in this tragic situation. The UN death toll is rising every day and the flag flutters at half mast outside the Mercy Global Concern window here in New York



With a per capita income of \$3.60 per day, Haiti is the most impoverished nation in the Western Hemisphere. Its population is especially vulnerable to natural disasters, as witnessed by this earthquake. The desperate conditions here serve as a stark reminder of the great global disparity in terms of wealth and access to the tools which would help people to lift themselves up out of poverty.

With this as a backdrop, this year, 2010, will be critical for one of the UN's key agenda items : the **Millennium Development Goals (MDG's)**. *"Time is short. We must seize this historic moment to act responsibly and decisively for the common good."*

With only six years until the 2015 deadline to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon chose these words to strongly urge Governments to engage constructively in their preparations for a high-level meeting in September 2010 to review progress toward the Goals; progress that continues to be threatened by the ongoing global economic crisis. In some cases, responses to the crisis, such as protectionist measures and new restrictions on migration, are compounding the risks.

Pressures on donor countries to cut their aid budgets may limit the resources available to developing countries, which in turn will face further difficulties in tackling the crisis and providing for the needs of their people. Since the Goals were adopted in 2000, there definitely has been progress in a number of areas, including poverty and hunger reduction, universal access to education and gender equality. But the economic crisis threatens to undermine, and, reverse these hard-won gains. Without a strong and concerted international response, the crisis could become a major development emergency.

At a briefing for NGOs this week, the deputy director of the UN Millennium Campaign spoke of the important role of Civil Society in preparing for the September MDG Review. The Review will be country specific, and *evidence* will be key. For example, why are some countries making progress, and others not? What are the specific factors influencing success, or failure? Are human rights abuses a reason for lack of progress? Is aid money getting to the people – or is it lining the pockets of corrupt officials? Governments will issue their own reports to state their case. However, **shadow reports** prepared by NGOs and other segments of civil society will likely tell another, more accurate story..

The challenge for NGOs is to mobilize their networks *on the ground* to become engaged in tracking their country's progress, or lack thereof. There are too many "Haitis" in our world today. Each one of us needs to consider what role we can play in helping to turn the tide.

In conclusion, I leave you with one source of light in this darkness. It is a video clip from an interview with one of our own working on the ground in [Haiti](#).

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