

February 21, 2010

Haiti Earthquake Relief Update

Things continue on in our location 90 miles north of the earthquake epicenter. As we expected, the population of refugees at Hosean's camp facility has ballooned to over 350 settled in for long term residence. We have also settled some families at the apartments available at our school facility. Please be praying for these people as they adjust to life in the countryside and continue to grieve for all the losses they've experienced.

Tents continue to be a huge need throughout the country. All of the tents we had received have been distributed or set up. We've filled up the semi-finished structures we already had at the camp and have settled the most recent arrivals into tents as you can see.

For the youngest, it is a fun thing to have a new home (see photo). This morning Caleb spent some time with the main group leaders of the refugees discussing security and distribution issues. These folks need assistance with everything as they rebuild their lives. But as I watched the camp manager hand out laundry soap the other day and then the women head out to the river next door to do laundry, I thought the rhythms of life even in the small



jobs are healing in themselves. Please be praying for Caleb and the leadership team as they seek the best ways to get people integrated into the community, all the children into schools, etc. The needs remain immense even in our relatively stable community. We have our third group of volunteers here this week from Fellowship Bible Church-Memphis, TN who are going to be helping with a variety of projects including putting up longer term shelters. As I look around our camp, I see so much need, but at least people have some mattresses, etc. It helped my perspective to read the following note from my good friend, Donna Adhemar, a Haitian-Canadian RN who's been in Port au Prince the last week:

"The day before we left I had the chance to walk through one of the IDP (internally displaced people) camps that we had been to several time. Heart wrenching. We gave them what supplies we could. There were still so many without even tarps over them. Their 'homes' were about 2 by 3 meters. I visited one older lady's home. The floor was stony and I asked her where she slept. She pointed to a piece of cardboard - it was about 3 feet long and 1 foot wide. She said she puts that down at night to sleep on. So very many needs everywhere you turn. . .



Photo taken by Caleb on Feb. 20th of Port au Prince tent city conditions

The last night in Haiti it rained - no, it poured. I woke to the water getting into my tent, because I had left the flaps open for a breeze. My first thought, though, was not about how wet I was, but how much misery the people I had visited in that IDP camp

were now going through. The next morning, I packed up and began the journey home. The next morning, they had to start cleaning up, but they had nowhere to go. I hope you will continue to pray with me that we don't forget these people in their misery that we will work and care and reach out a helping hand to lift them out of where they are and give them the chance to have hope and a future.

I received today another update from Rotary Past District Governor Dick McCombe who traveled to Port au Prince yesterday for high level meetings between Haitian government officials and members of the Haiti Task Force, including Caleb. Please understand this is a gentleman who has traveled extensively in and around Haiti prior to the earthquake. I found his descriptions and observations very telling as we try to understand what we are facing:

"After the distribution site we toured Port au Prince and Petion-Ville. I can only tell you that I felt my expectation of what I would see was based on my experience in Haiti and a very informed understanding of what the infrastructure was pre earthquake and how desperate the situation was pre earthquake. I must tell you that I was shocked beyond words at the destruction and magnitude of the disaster. While I expected to see thousands of crumbled buildings and the devastation I had no idea it could be so bad.

As we drove block after block, we saw either all or every couple of buildings imploded. It pained me to know that in most of them there could have been anywhere from 1 to 50 or 60 dead people still in the rubble never to be found, claimed or even buried. Besides the imploded buildings, fallen walls, cracked and broken structures, the entire infrastructure was also laying on the ground pushed to the side. Things like power lines, phone lines and water lines. This was amplified by the sewerage and water running down the streets carrying the garbage and loose possessions.

As a quick perspective I was told the following. 15% of the country is now homeless, additionally 10% are displaced. I was also told that they have estimated that if they take 1000 loads of rubble per day from the streets, it will take a full 2 years to remove all the destruction."

I can only say that it is a good thing the Haitian people are used to struggles and suffering; because the work ahead for all of us is almost beyond comprehension. As a Christian, I take comfort in the fact that I serve a God who sees and knows what we are facing as well.

Blessings from Haiti, Debbie L. www.hosean.org