

HAITI PROTECTION CLUSTER

Haiti Earthquake: Key Protection Activities and Issues

17 February 2010

I. Overview of Protection Cluster and Sub-Cluster Activities

The **Protection Cluster**, which OHCHR is leading with support from UNHCR, has been active for almost a month now (since 22 January 2010). The sub-clusters led by UNICEF on child protection and by UNFPA on gender-based violence (GBV) continue to be up and running as well. **The Protection Cluster and MINUSTAH's Human Rights Section have been strengthened** by five additional staff members (OHCHR and UNHCR) during the past days and OHCHR is working on the deployment of another six people.

The Protection Cluster has reinforced its **monitoring work** and is organizing a **protection monitoring system for Port-au-Prince**. The **Protection Cluster in Les Cayes has been activated** and will be meeting regularly. Additional staff will be deployed to Gonaives, Les Cayes and Jérémie in the coming weeks. OHCHR, MINUSTAH Human Rights, UN Habitat and the International Development Law Organisation are looking into the possibility of **activating the Housing, Land and Property area of responsibility of the Protection Cluster**.

During the past week, the Protection Cluster has been coordinating the inputs on protection for the **Revision of the Flash Appeal**, which has been extended to 12 months. The revised Flash Appeal will be launched on 18 February in New York.

The Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) asked the Protection Cluster to take the **lead on registration issues**. A strategy for registration will be presented to the HCT on 18 February.

The **Sub-Cluster on GBV** has started to **disseminate relevant messages** over local radio and other media outlets. Messaging will focus on sharing real life stories of prevention of GBV and on the recently updated GBV list of health and psychosocial service providers and existing police stations. The GBV list of service providers has been updated and shared with all GBV Sub-Cluster members. The list will be shared more broadly in the coming days.

The **Child Protection Sub-Cluster** reported that approximately 126 separated and unaccompanied children had been registered by 14 February. Cases are being entered in the Inter-agency Child Protection information management system being established at MINUSTAH Logbase. The Sub-Cluster's **Child Protection Brigade** intercepted 22 children at the border of Ouanaminthe (7 were unaccompanied and without papers) by 14 February.

Thirty-two child friendly spaces have been established in affected areas, according to UNICEF. Five hundred and thirty-six child protection kits have been distributed to date to 228 child residential care centers, meeting the needs of 12,867 children. Some 150,000 children and their care-givers are benefiting from child protection activities of the sub-cluster partners.

The Protection Cluster arranged for a **shipment of 17,000 solar powered torches** from UNHCR to be distributed through partners to women across sites in Port-au-Prince and possibly other locations.

Within the food distribution cluster, a dialogue has been initiated on **sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) prevention and response** mechanisms with all food distribution partners, including at the governmental level.

On 12 February, UNHCR and OHCHR issued a joint statement, **urging countries to suspend involuntary returns to Haiti**. Both agencies called on countries to continue granting interim protection measures on humanitarian grounds.

Due to the improved aid operations, the **US military has pulled thousands of its troops**. Currently, there are roughly 13,000 US military men and women supporting the efforts in Haiti. It is not clear yet, however, how long the US troops will remain in the country.

II. General issues

A month after the earthquake, the scale of the disaster is still becoming apparent. The UN Secretary General stated on 12 February that finding **adequate shelter and sanitation remain the greatest challenges** of the relief effort.

Edmond Mulet, the Acting SRSG in Haiti, stated that the security situation is under control but that there are concerns about the prison inmates who escaped from the National Penitentiary during the quake, believed to be responsible for an **increase in rapes at camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs)** and battles over control of neighbourhoods. So far, around 100 of the escaped inmates have been captured by the Haitian National Police but some 400 of the “most dangerous” inmates are still at large.

It was announced that up to **90 Haitians were going to be returned** on 16 February after their interception by the US coast guards last weekend. Last week, a first group of 78 Haitians were returned to Haiti.

In **Léogâne**, 3,000 bodies have been buried in mass graves. According to the local authorities, 37,000 houses were damaged and most of the communal sections have not yet received humanitarian aid.

The humanitarian operation and the reconstruction process need to be conducted in full **consultation and with consent of the Haitian Government and the population**, which remains one of the main aims and advocacy areas of the Protection Cluster. Furthermore, the authorities and civil society need to have access to information regarding the relief efforts.

Since the quake, **food prices have been extremely volatile in Haiti**, with the price of wheat flour surging by 70 per cent from the levels of December last year. Maize and black beans, two commodities produced locally, have jumped by between 30 and 35 per cent. This has had a detrimental impact on food security of the local population.

UNDP’s **cash-for-work programme** has now employed more than 35,000 Haitians to remove debris for around \$4 for a half-day’s work. It has been announced that in future months, heavy machinery will be brought in to clear the larger rubble and to clear land for temporary camps for the displaced.

III. Particular Protection Concerns

Sexual and Gender-Based Violence: Attention needs to be given to the dignity and safety of women in camps and settlements. As the humanitarian response becomes better coordinated, cases of GBV are increasingly being reported to implementing partners and then onward to members of the GBV Sub-Cluster and the Protection Cluster. Insufficient lighting at night still

remains a problem, as it increases the risk of sexual and gender based violence. Furthermore, there is an urgent need for improved sanitation in the existing camps and for women-friendly new settlements and buildings.

Child Protection: During the 15 February Sub-Cluster meeting, participants noted that mapping child protection activities in Port-au-Prince and other areas remains a priority. Information gaps remain regarding coverage of psychosocial programmes. UNICEF presented the Cluster with a list of 19 priority settlement sites – each hosting more than 5,000 individuals – for implementation of child protection activities.

Rule of Law: According to information received, members of the Haitian National Police have allegedly committed a significant number of extrajudicial executions, targeting suspected looters, thieves and criminals. Therefore, there is an urgent need to verify and to follow up on such serious cases of human rights violations.

Displacement: There are increasing concerns over the depletion of water reserves and food supplies in regions where the influx of displaced from Port-au-Prince has been significant. The rise in the price of commodities in these regions could lead to possible tensions between host communities and those coming from Port-au-Prince, especially with those that have no family links in the region. Furthermore, there is an urgent need to indentify and find reasonable alternative solutions for the thousands of internally displaced people who have settled in areas that are likely to be hit by mudslides when the rainy season begin. Therefore, relocation is urgent, and when undertaken it must be in full consultation with the affected population taking into account groups with special protection needs. Last Thursday, several hundred people marched to the Government Headquarters near the airport a few hours after it started raining. These showers were the first ones after the earthquake. Demonstrators chanted slogans hostile to the Government, denouncing the tardiness of its relief response and the shortage of shelters. The crowd was dispersed after two hours. No incident was reported.

Shelter: So far around 49,000 tarpaulins have been distributed along with 23,000 family-sized tents to the hundreds of thousands of displaced people, and according to OCHA, 400,000 plastic sheets are in stock and in the pipeline. According to the Emergency Coordinator, distribution of the emergency shelter material is going on at a 30 to 35 per cent and therefore, more efforts in this regard are needed.

Sanitation: Most displaced people are forced to wash in public, which has a particularly strong impact on the dignity of women. Sanitation facilities are insufficient, lack lighting and only 5 per cent of the required latrines are in place. Some 3,000 latrines will be installed in Port-au-Prince in the coming weeks. OCHA stated that the goal is to have 50 percent of latrines completed by the end February.

IV. Request for Action by Cluster Members

There is a need for more systematic information collection and sharing. The monitoring role of MINUSTAH'S Human Rights Section is slowly starting to function again and still needs to be strengthened significantly. Presently, OHCHR at HQ level is assisting the field in preparing the weekly Issues and Update Paper but the regularity and flow of information needs to increase. Cluster members are requested to send information regarding the activities of their organizations, their deployments, as well as findings and advocacy messages to haiticell@ohchr.org.

**Note prepared by OHCHR based on input from members of the Haiti Protection Cluster
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