

A Perspective on Aid to Haiti

Contributed by Ray L. Jenson
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I received this email on an email list that I belong to this morning:

Speaking from the perspective of a Search and Rescue Professional, I think you will find that everything worked the way it was supposed to, huge factors are playing in your perception of a delayed US response:

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The government of Haiti was largely decapitated. Without leadership, there was no one on the ground to organize an initial response.

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As the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere and speaking from personal experience with operations to support Haiti, there is a significant and severe lack of first responders. Yes, to those of you in the US accustomed to someone else risking their lives and well-being to save you in times of peril, often peril of your own making, there are countries on the face of the earth both black and white that lack or suffer from insufficient numbers of police, firefighters, emergency medical services, coast guards, etc.

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In China the tents were up because China had the tents right there. Again, as the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, Haiti has trouble providing basic daily services, e.g. firefighters, much less a stockpile of emergency services equipment and supplies. Similarly, because it cannot afford basic daily services to a large extent, it also cannot afford the specialized training needed by disaster response people.

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The airport had to be stabilized before the relief your screeching about could start pouring in. On NPR I have heard some criticize relief efforts by comparing them to the reporters who managed to get in the first day. One reporter with a three-person camera crew, getting in via a Bell Jet Ranger (a very small) helicopter with maybe 600 pounds of camera gear and personal effects is a lot different than a C-17 cargo plane or SH-53 Super Stallion helicopter loaded with tons of water and food. Or, are the crews of those aircraft, who also have parents, wives, husbands, and children supposed to risk their lives unnecessarily to land on a potentially unsafe runway?

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And by the way, with limited access how would you prioritize the relief efforts, would you send in the Search and Rescue teams to dig people out first or food and water for those who were not buried? It all cannot go in at the same time even in the best of circumstances. By doctrine the Search and Rescue teams go in first to do "direct life saving." It stems from the rule of fours: four minutes without air; four days without water; four weeks without food and humans die. So, now with that piece of information, you prioritize what goes in first. It's a harsh rule, but it's biology and we can't change that.

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Nope, I am afraid you are all wrong. The relief efforts are going just about the way they're supposed to be going, whether you think it or not. Consider your own "travel." Do you get up in the morning and decide to take a flight to someplace one thousand miles away and you're there within six or eight hours? Hell no! You buy your ticket weeks in advance to get the best price. You start packing your measly 50 or 100 pounds of clothes and toiletries a day or two before. You leave for the airport in time to get there two hours early. Then you fly there. Now multiply that by a standing start, no one is standing by with pallets of water and emergency food on a forklift just waiting to be loaded into a waiting cargo plane. Even if they were, even if such a thing were possible, because you would be screeching about the wasted money in that, the receiving airport still needs to be checked and stabilized for safety because if the plane hits a hole in the runway and crashes killing its crew and causing a tragedy for the crew's families, the people they're trying to help still don't have the GDed tents, food and water you're yelling about.

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Nope, again you're wrong this is going like it's supposed to. Aid and big time aid started arriving Wednesday and started flooding in yesterday about 48-72 hours post-incident. That's why FEMA and the state emergency management people tell you to be able to "survive" on your own for 72 hours, because it takes that long to gear up a response, to a major disaster. And they're not talking about nine Big Macs, orders of fries, and Cokes. You can live on a can of pork and beans, with a can of green beans, and some crackers for a day. Hell you'll probably get fat, because if you look at the can it's probably more like two or three servings. For water, you don't need Dasani water in their designer bottles. Take an old milk jug, wash it out and fill it before the water is cut off, and voila there is water for one for a day. Multiply that by

the number of people in the house and multiply by three and you've got your three-day supply of water! Keep it on hand and change it out every month, using the "old" water to water your flowers or whatever then replace it with fresh.

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I am afraid you all are symptomatic of what's wrong with the United States. Everyone wants someone else to take care of them at all times. Well sometimes, help isn't just a phone call away and right around the corner. Sometimes you have to take care of yourselves until help arrives even if for a little while. But, I guess others are supposed to pull out all the stops to bail you out of your travails. And, you know what? We do! I lost too many buddies over the years trying to save people's lives for you to convince me otherwise.

Rick Ramos

This was posted in response to a positively scathing article which criticized the US administration for its lack of mobility in rendering aid to the people of Haiti after the recent earthquake.