

# Australia's Humanitarian Aid

## Haiti Earthquake

The impoverished nation of Haiti was devastated by an earthquake of 7.0 magnitude, on 12 January 2010. It was one of the few earthquakes to occur near a capital city. Port-au-Prince was levelled.

More than one million Haitians were left homeless by the disaster which killed 220,000 people. The Inter-American Development Bank puts the cost of the disaster at up to US\$13.2 billion.

The earthquake struck a country already struggling. Haiti is one of the world's poorest countries, with 77 per cent of the population living on less than US\$2 a day. Child mortality is high, education rates are low, less than half of Port-au-Prince's population has access to sanitation and only one third can access tap water.

**Globally, the number and scale of disasters is increasing. Small countries, like Haiti, are extremely vulnerable.**

Australia was one of the first countries to respond with humanitarian assistance. We have given \$24 million to support emergency relief, early recovery and reconstruction needs in Haiti. This has been delivered through United Nations agencies and non-government organisations, such as the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and Australian community-based organisations. In addition, the Australian people generously donated \$26 million to Haiti appeals.

The Australian Government contribution supported early life-saving interventions—food to an estimated 3.5 million people; and clean water, shelter, education and protection for 4800 children.

International assistance has seen 1.3 million people access safe water; 1.7 million given material for shelter; more than 500,000 given hygiene kits; more than 500,000 vaccinated against common diseases; and nearly 60,000 children join child-friendly areas and activities.

**Australians donate more than \$100 million each year to help those affected by disasters and conflict overseas.**

Striking so close to the capital crippled the country's ability to respond—many of those killed were from the government's civil service. Major city-based services, such as hospitals and schools, were destroyed with staff killed or injured.

Given this, the United Nations kick-started the massive relief effort through its Central Emergency Response Fund, of which Australia is a strong supporter. The global fund, backed by 115 United Nations member states and private sector donors, provides immediate assistance to humanitarian agencies so they can mobilise an emergency response. It demonstrates the important role the United Nations can play in ensuring timely, well-targeted assistance.

Australia is also a supporter of the United Nations Haiti Cholera Appeal in the fight to reduce deaths and sickness from this disease—one of the worst outbreaks in the past 100 years. Cholera thrives in conditions with poor sanitation, polluted water and overcrowded living—all common in a developing country recovering from a disaster. Australia's assistance has supported the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to provide clean water, water purification tablets and hygiene kits.

**Australia is increasing its humanitarian work to help those in dire need.**

Taking time out from her role as a public health coordinator in Victorian local government, Kirsten Jenkins spent most of her time in Haiti training local Red Cross volunteers to educate people about health issues. This included using comics about hygiene, for children.

"Health is always going to be an issue when you've got up to 20 people sharing the same tent," said Kirsten.

“So it’s vital that the volunteers have a presence out in the camps and are able to talk to people about keeping themselves healthy and looking after themselves in such basic and overcrowded conditions. In many cases it was as simple as distributing messages about washing your hands and drinking safe water.”

**We work in partnership around the world. Humanitarian action is strongest when everyone works together.**

Port-au-Prince still bears scars from the earthquake. Rubble lines the streets and about one million people live in makeshift camps. The international community supports the Government of Haiti’s action plan for recovery, reconstruction and development. Priority tasks are demolition and removing debris, rebuilding houses, education, and disaster risk reduction initiatives.

Many aid agencies are looking after those in camps, building transitional homes, getting people back to work, strengthening community health, and providing safe water and sanitation through new infrastructure and water treatment training.

**Preparing for disasters and reducing their potential impact, protects lives and development progress.**

Rebuilding will take years. Australia supports a United Nations Cash for Work program which creates employment for more than 95,000 Haitians, through working on reconstruction activities. This enables them to rebuild their livelihoods through rebuilding their country. It helps small business and stimulates the local economy.

AusAID has also funded child-friendly spaces to allow children to have structured play in a safe, supervised place and parents to have time alone to rebuild their homes and lives. This supports families as they recover from the trauma.

**Disaster response is important. More information about Australia’s humanitarian aid is available online at [www.ausaid.gov.au](http://www.ausaid.gov.au)**