

Remarks by President Obama Recovery and Rebuilding Effort in Haiti

Rose Garden

11:02 A.M. EST

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Good morning, everybody. In times of great challenge in our country and around the world, Americans have always come together to lend a hand and to serve others and to do what's right. That's what the American people have been doing in recent days with their extraordinary generosity and contributions to the Haitian people.

At this moment, we're moving forward with one of the largest relief efforts in our history -- to save lives and to deliver relief that averts an even larger catastrophe. The two leaders with me today will ensure that this is matched by a historic effort that extends beyond our government, because America has no greater resource than the strength and the compassion of the American people.

We just met in the Oval Office -- an office they both know well. And I'm pleased that President George W. Bush and President Bill Clinton have agreed to lead a major fundraising effort for relief: the Clinton Bush Haiti Fund. On behalf of the American people, I want to thank both of you for returning to service and leading this urgent mission.

This is a model that works. After the terrible tsunami in Asia, President Bush turned to President Clinton and the first President Bush to lead a similar fund. That effort raised substantial resources for the victims of that disaster -- money that helped save lives, deliver aid, and rebuild communities. And that's exactly what the people of Haiti desperately need right now.

Every day that goes by, we learn more about the horrifying scope of this catastrophe -- destruction and suffering that defies comprehension. Entire communities buried under mountains of concrete. Families sleeping in the streets. Injured desperate for care. Many thousands feared dead. That's why thousands of American personnel -- civilian and military -- are on the scene working to distribute clean drinking water and food and medicine, and thousands of tons of emergency food supplies are arriving every day.

It will be difficult. It is an enormous challenge to distribute this aid quickly and safely in a place that has suffered such destruction. That's what we're focused on now -- working closely with our partners: the Haitian government, the United Nations, and many organizations and nations -- friends from Argentina and France, from Dominican Republic and Brazil, and countries all around the world.

And Secretary Hillary Clinton will be in Haiti today to meet with President Préval and continue our close coordination with his government. But we also know that our longer-term effort will not be

measured in days and weeks; it will be measured in months and even years. And that's why it's so important to enlist and sustain the support of the American people. That's why it's so important to have a point of coordination for all the support that extends beyond our government.

Here at home, Presidents Bush and Clinton will help the American people to do their part, because responding to a disaster must be the work of all of us. Indeed, those wrenching scenes of devastation remind us not only of our common humanity but also of our common responsibilities. This time of suffering can and must be a time of compassion.

As the scope of the destruction became apparent, I spoke to each of these gentlemen, and they each asked the same simple question: How can I help? In the days ahead they'll be asking everyone what they can do -- individuals, corporations, NGOs, and institutions. And I urge everyone who wants to help to visit www.clintonbushhaitifund.org.

We're fortunate to have the service of these two leaders. President Bush led America's response to the Asian tsunami, aid and relief that prevented even greater loss of life in the months after that disaster. And his administration's efforts to fight against HIV/AIDS in Africa treated more than 10 million men, women, and children.

As President, Bill Clinton helped restore democracy in Haiti. As a private citizen, he has helped to save the lives of millions of people around the world. And as the United Nations special envoy to Haiti, he understands intimately the daily struggles and needs of the Haitian people.

And by coming together in this way, these two leaders send an unmistakable message to the people of Haiti and to the people of the world: In these difficult hours, America stands united. We stand united with the people of Haiti, who have shown such incredible resilience, and we will help them to recover and to rebuild.

Yesterday we witnessed a small but remarkable display of that determination -- some of you may have seen it -- Haitians with little more than the clothes on their back marched peacefully through a ruined neighborhood, and despite all their loss and all their suffering they sang songs of faith and songs of hope.

These are the people we're called upon to help. Those are the hopes that we're committed to answering. That's why the three of us are standing together today. And with that, I would invite each President to say a few words. I'm going to start with President Bush.