

## COMUNICADO DE PRENSA

Jimaní, key support point for Haiti aid

**Jimaní, Dominican Republic. 14 January 2009.-** When we entered the town's small paediatric ward, we saw six children are lying in beds. They are being treated, but their conditions require a higher degree of monitoring. One of them, 10-year old Surzan Pedro, who has a fracture in his right leg and a left leg that appears to be all swollen, is accompanied by his father, who explains that his legs had been trapped when their house collapsed.

Surzan is one of 25 children among dozens of Haitians who have crossed the border into the Dominican Republic to seek medical care. His father, speaking in a subdued voice and with tears in his eyes, mentions the loss of family members without giving many details; it appears that he doesn't want his son to hear about the loss of some close relatives. But with some satisfaction he shows us the X-Ray he was given and lifts the sheet covering the boy's leg so that we can see the plaster cast he has been fitted with. His son is alive!

This is one of many painful stories that are shared with us during our brief visit. We saw a young mother who had suffered a strong blow to her shoulder and her one-month-old baby who had suffered a blow to the chest. She showed us how she had hugged him during the earthquake, but could not prevent him from being hit. Seven-year old Jean-Paul is also there, and although he doesn't know that he has lost his mother and two brothers his face reveals all the sadness and pain imaginable.

There are only six children being treated in this hospital ward, but others have been taken to a reception centre staffed by members of a religious order. In order to cope with the continuing influx of more injured patients, the health centre tries to make beds available for the new arrivals that keep on coming in from Haiti. Injured people line the corridors, waiting for treatment, others who have been treated stay there because they don't know where to go.

So far the Dr. Melenciano hospital has treated 140 people, recorded three deaths and its medical supplies are running out, because demand is overtaking estimates. We spoke to the Provincial Health Director, Nancy Santana, who says that 77 operations have been performed at the hospital and that the most serious cases have been transferred to other hospitals in Barahona and Santo Domingo.

Movement inside the hospital is intense. We watched an X-Ray unit being taken to the entrance hall to be used on an injured patient who could not be moved. The idea is to provide immediate treatment to each patient. Other staff members are administering anti-tetanus vaccinations while others simply clean the corridors.

Many people are seeking information about their relatives in the area around the hospital, while groups of Dominican bystanders watch the injured arriving in vehicles or ambulances.

## **United Nations Aid.**

The Army fortress in this border town is the assembly point for dozens of Civil Defence volunteers tents, military helicopters and vehicles, tanker trucks for transporting water, industrial stoves and a range of international aid agency vehicles who have made this their coordination point for transporting humanitarian aid overland. Dozens of people are milling around this area and many newly arrived young volunteers are being given instructions.

UNICEF, PAHO/WHO, WFP and UNFPHA, together with other aid agencies, are moving amongst the army personnel who control the fortress. This is just the start of an aid operation that will require a very high level of international and national cooperation, and in which Jimaní can be the key point between the Dominican Republic and Haiti.

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