

News Note

UNICEF Humanitarian Operation in Haiti Zeroes in on Unaccompanied Children

NEW YORK, 27 January 2010 - Assistance to unaccompanied children, who have lost or become separated from their families, is a focus of UNICEF's Haitian humanitarian operations, in the wake of the deadly earthquake which struck on 12 January.

While it continues daily delivery of critical life-saving supplies such as water, nutrition, shelter and medicine (so far, UNICEF supplies for 250,000 children have arrived and are being distributed), UNICEF and partners like Save the Children have also begun registering unaccompanied children found in the streets of Port au Prince. A programme will then begin to trace the families of these children, if they exist.

"Safe Spaces" for unaccompanied children including infants are now set up in the capital. These locations allow UNICEF and its partners to assist and protect children who have nowhere else to go, until their families are found or alternative arrangements are made.

Unaccompanied children are especially vulnerable to disease, malnutrition and exploitation, including trafficking and need urgent assistance as well as, in many cases, long term support.

The safe spaces are places where unaccompanied children can find shelter, food, water and medicines and they can also serve as make-shift schools and recreation areas.

Safe spaces have been used by UNICEF to protect children in the aftermath of emergencies, most recently in cyclone-hit Myanmar and in Banda Aceh, Indonesia, post-Tsunami and also to reunite them with their families. With nearly 40 per cent of the population under 14 years of age in Haiti, this is clearly a children's emergency, and the need for support and protection, registration and family tracing is widespread.

The earthquake which struck on 12 January caused huge numbers of deaths, injuries and widespread damage to Haiti's already fragile infrastructures. The United Nations and its humanitarian agencies, NGOs, the US Government and many others, have mounted a massive relief and rebuilding operation.

About UNICEF

UNICEF is on the ground in over 150 countries and territories to help children survive and thrive, from early childhood through adolescence. The world's largest provider of vaccines for developing countries, UNICEF supports child health and nutrition, good water and sanitation, quality basic education for all boys and girls, and the protection of children from violence, exploitation, and AIDS. UNICEF is funded entirely by the voluntary contributions of individuals, businesses, foundations and governments.

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