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**Subject:** FR. GIO'S REPORT ON THE PRESENT SITUATION IN HAITI

FR. GIO'S REPORT ON THE PRESENT SITUATION IN HAITI

Dear Friends and Partners

I have just returned from Haiti. I feel as though I have been for a full week in a war-zone. Never in my life did I see so much suffering, hunger, pain, destruction and misery. The whole country of Haiti is a war zone. Destruction is everywhere!

We walked through the streets of Port-au-Prince. Some of our people went as far as Leogone, Petit Goave and then out towards St. Mark - the country is one broken rock pile. Dust is everywhere. The smell of death is in the air. Especially in the area near to St. Ard where 70,000 people are buried in a mass grave and the bulldozer is still at work burying people.

Lamothe (one of the team members) said "the Haitians live like trash and are buried like trash." This should not be. The people are crying out to God to help them. We pass them on the mountains tops standing with arms outstretched and I wonder will we ever answer their prayer? We did not know where to go first or what was important for us to see. My first concern was to see that the people are fed. Each day our kitchen cooked for over 2,000 people. Thank God for Madam Raymonde Pun a Croatian Relief Director in Port-au-Prince a woman with much experience in serving the poorest of the poor. She worked for Catholic Charities many years ago and then for Food For The Poor for over 25 years. Croatian Relief Services was so glad when she decided to work for us. She joined us last April and since then many great things have happened. She established our Youth Center, Cardinal Stepinac. Organized feeding center for the street children. Helped us organize several orphanages which Croatian Relief has been supporting since April 2009. After this tragic earthquake she has immediately mobilized a soup kitchen where she with her volunteers are cooking and feeding over 2,000 people each day with the food supplied by Croatian Relief Services. The meals are cooked and then distributed to the hungry people all over Port-au-Prince area and beyond. When the food runs out we are disappointed, because this is all we could do for that day and thousands more went their way hungry.

Some teams from other organization told us that they traveled together to other parts of affected area such as Morne a Chandell. When the team arrived they immediately saw that the church was demolished. They met Father's living now under a sheet held up by sticks and set up among the other small tents occupied by family members and people of the village - a tent city. It is sad to see the tall, proud priest sleep under the sheets outside on the rocky land. Father Jean Petit Francois rectory is not habitable and never will be again - only the outer walls are up - it is full of concrete - it was impossible to open one of the doors but I could look in and see the rubble. The only building standing was the kindergarten.

Abdul Fall (owner of the construction firm) came up to inspect the school while we were there. The prior to the construction there was a question whether to build with a construction firm or with the locals. We are very glad that the decision was made to spend more money and build with a reliable construction firm. The outdoor toilet for the children is gone. The small clinic (Rainbow Clinic) will fall soon.

Some of our missionary friends continue to visit various towns in the area and they brought us news of destruction and misery. A group of them spent two nights at Morne a Chandelle - the medical team saw 500 people in one day, while the Assessment Team went back to Port au Prince to beg for food and take an elderly and injured to the Sacred Heart Hospital in Port au Prince for treatment. The hospital was full of physicians, nurses and medicines. The medical people of God are busy helping the people of Haiti. It was unbelievable.

While we were in the city and the medical team was seeing patients, Matthew Roy was busy walking for two hours and taking photos of the destruction in Morne a Chandelle. Father Petit's small chapels throughout the area are also destroyed.

Father Petit buried 54 people - 50 were school children. Father Anis was with us visiting Father Petit but had to return the next day to bury more people in his village.

Father Petit was in Port au Prince when this happened and it is a good thing or he would have been under the rubble of his rectory. Other teams went to Les Palmes and the Medical team went to Petit Goave.

Les Palmes - The trip to Les Palmes was better than anticipated thanks to a Baptist minister who has an earthmoving machine - he was going up and down the mountain with the caterpillar and clearing the rocks off the road. The problem is that in some spots in the road is eroded underneath and could at any time fall in, this means no large trucks can reach Les Palmes for fear of the road caving in.

Father Johnson's church is completely gone. The rectory has cracks all over and is unstable - it will unfortunately need to be demolished. Father is lucky in there is a small building (used for the professors to stay when they came to teach in the high school).

The outside toilet for the high school children is demolished. The local high school is still standing. It has some cracks and needs to be evaluated by experts. We think it is and hope pray that it will soon be occupied by the students. The computer lab is intact. Father buried over 500 people in Les Palmes.

We drove and looked at homes until we came to rock slide over the road and then we went by foot. Every home that we saw was uninhabitable. Either completely flat or on its side - we bandaged a few people as we walked and listen to their stories - the children's eyes are dead - there is no joy in their faces many do not know their names nor the names of their dead parents. We held babies in our arms and cried and talked to all the people at their homes and every house is gone. I think we could have walked for days and days and all we would see were homes that were gone. I remember the old lady sleeping in small rubble that was her home. I remember the teachers who homes are destroyed. I remember the old man who buried so many dead people that his wife was afraid to get near him for fear of catching a disease from the dead and decomposed bodies. These people have no tents - no blankets and it is cold in the mountains - no utensils to eat with - they eat with their hands - if they have food - which so many do not.

Father Johnson was in the rectory on the second floor - heard the church fall in and looked outside and saw it was gone - contemplated jumping and instead ran outside. Odette, a young lady of Les Palmes, was not so lucky - she jumped from a second story building in Port au Prince and was badly injured - lived a few days in one of the tent cities and came back to Les Palmes.

The 5 University Students that the Mission supports in Port au Prince are all well. Luke was under the rubble of their rented apartment in Port au Prince for 3 hours. He was rescued by the other students who dug him out. He had damage to one of his legs - and is fine now. They have returned back to live in Les Palmes. Their University (GOC) is completely destroyed.

Durissy - The Assessment team was unable to get to the school at Durissy. We went to the city and for two days begged for food at various organizations and this time was successful. Received Food, Clothing, and Shoes for all three of the villages. This was mainly successful because of another humanitarian group who worked tirelessly to get organizations to give us help.

St Anne/St. Ard - Our next trip was to visit Father Anis at St. Anne in St Ard which was not particularly hard hit by the earthquake. We do not twin with Father Anis in St. Anne but we do support his small school with teachers in the village of Durassy (which we were unable to get to this time because of the roads).

Father Anis is living outside in a tent with many other people outside of the rectory. The rectory has some damage (unable to ascertain exactly what needs to be done). His main church is ok - he has 3 nuns and their 2 nieces who have moved in a tent outside of his rectory. His extended family has multiplied by many. Food is at a shortage because of the influx of people fleeing Port au Prince. His two chapels have been destroyed.

Father Anis buried 180 people and 15 nuns who died and whose cemetery is located in his parish. He said he had to wear a mask because the Sister's bodies smelled so badly.

After staying with Father Anis for one night we began our journey back to Port au Prince to meet with our staff to further discuss the situation and to help them to be encouraged for the days ahead.

Father Anis was busy on this trip rescuing us as the Assessment team got stuck on the road to Les Palmes. The Baptist Minister Caterpillar truck broke down and blocked the road so it was impassible. Father Anis came to the rescue and took us back to Port au Prince and went with us on our begging for food trip.

Matthew Roy's team ended up assisting the patients in Petit Goave with a group of doctors and nurses providing care at a Methodist Center. The team delivered 6 babies - new birth among the debris of Haiti. They delivered 5 beautiful girls and one lovely boy. As Colin (the doctor) said one evening in Morne a Chandelle sometimes out of the broken crack in the concrete a new growth shoots up and this what happened in Petit Goave.

#### THOUGHTS & COMMENTS

Croatian Relief Services received and purchased food from various sources in Haiti. Food there is very expensive. 100 lbs of rice costs now 80.00 US dollars. Over \$50.00 more than the price we pay here in the US. Most of the food brought by Croatian Relief Services was purchased and will continue to be purchased from Goya Foods in Dominican Republic. This is the fastest and the cheapest way to help the poor at the present time. More food will be coming to Port-au-Prince and will be distributed to many areas, cities and towns mentioned above. Our soup kitchen will continue to function as long as we have funds to purchase the food. The people were very generous to Croatian Relief Services these days but the destruction and need is so vast that our budget is drying up quickly and the real problem is just about to begin. From our past experiences the people stop giving the minute the cameras are shut off. I am afraid that this may become the case with Haiti.

The tent cities established in the area after the quake are still in need of blankets and more tents. Our Relief needs monetary donations in order to purchase these items and ship them to the people before the raining season which is not far off. This is an urgent need and we want to beat the coming raining season. Thousands are still on the streets and have no tents, no food, no clothing....nothing.

No one has come to many affected mountain villages (Morne a Chandelle/Les Palmes) - no charitable organizations of any kind! Our Mission team was the first they saw since the Earthquake. The villages are so far away from civilization they are difficult to find on a good day and impossible after a disaster such as this.

One of the misconceptions we heard several times in Haiti is the people in the country have food - the reality is that all the cousins, uncles and other relatives have come to live with them and food is at a minimum, they do not grow enough food to feed their families normally and now they have extended families to feed. Secondly, in the villages that we serve, the farmers just planted their crops of beans and corn. The beans are about 3 inches high and will not be ready for 2-1/2 to 3 months. This means they are hungry and they need food for the next few months.

Our hope is out of this rubble of rock and destruction, a new day can come. I thought of Jesus in the Apostle Creed - He descended into Hell and the third day rose again. Haiti has descended into Hell and it is up to us the people of

God to help them rise up. We are the ones, we are the arms, hands and hearts that God needs to help these poorest of people. When the little girl in Les Palmes followed me to the car and the interpreter said she has not eaten for many days and all I had was a handful of peanut butter crackers to hand this child - I wonder - can we allow this to continue? Are you and I not the hands and feet of Christ?

God Bless you all as you read this and I pray that you can in some way give to Croatian Relief Services so that we may continue to do the work of God in solidarity with the our brothers and sisters who had very little and now they have nothing.

God bless you,

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