

January 28, 2010

Dear Members of the United States Congress,

The outpouring of aid from U.S. citizens and their government to Haiti in the wake of this immense catastrophe has been important and welcome. However, it is also clear that there have been serious mistakes that have unnecessarily delayed the delivery of medical supplies, water, and other life-saving materials.

Currently, there are major shortages reported of food, tents, and water.

The most costly unnecessary delays had until recently been in the area of medical supplies.

A team of volunteer surgeons including the incoming president of the New York State Chapter of the American College of Surgeons, whose deployment was delayed for days by the U.S. military, reported that ["untold numbers are dying of untreated, preventable infections."](#)

Doctors Without Borders (MSF), the world-renowned humanitarian group is one of the organizations who had tons of medical supplies re-routed because of decisions made by the U.S. government.

["We lost three days,"](#) [Francoise Saulnier, the head of MSF's legal department] told Reuters Television in an interview. "And these three days have created a massive problem with infection, with gangrene, with amputations that are needed now, while we could have really spared this to those people."

Jarry Emmanuel, air logistics officer for the UN's World Food Programme, noted on January 16 that ["most flights are for the US military."](#)

Perhaps the biggest mistake has been an overemphasis on security, and the deployment of 20,000 troops, to the detriment of delivery of life-saving supplies. This was especially true during the first 10-12 days after the earthquake hit.

Although the situation with regard to medical supplies has recently improved, there are now other shortages, including food, water, and tents.

To avoid more unnecessary loss of life in the coming weeks, we call upon the Administration to guarantee the following:

- A daily public accounting of the shipments of materials and personnel that pass through the Port-au-Prince airport or any other ports under control of the U.S. military

- A public commitment to prioritize the distribution of vital aid and supplies and personnel, including water, medical supplies, food, medical personnel, and shelter. This means that these supplies and personnel must be given priority over the deployment of any more military personnel or equipment.
- A public announcement as to what measures our government will take going forward to make sure that the mistakes of the first two weeks are not repeated.
- A public commitment to deliver, water, food, and other urgently needed supplies to rural areas and other population centers that have seen little or no, or greatly delayed aid
- A public commitment to that ensuring all survivors in Haiti receive the necessities: clean water, food, shelter, and medical care, and that all resources received will be immediately deployed for this purpose
- A public commitment to work with all governments and Civil Society Organizations that are delivering these needed goods and services

While security can help to ensure a better distribution of aid, the actual distribution of aid is most important. While it is true that there have been some supplies lost to looting, this is not nearly so terrible as the loss of life and limb that has occurred due to unnecessary delays. The over-emphasis on security has been costly, and must not be repeated – from now on the top priority must be the delivery and distribution of the basic survival needs of the population. The Administration must publicly reassure the world that this will indeed be the priority going forward.

Sincere Regards,

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