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The White House

Office of the Press Secretary



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Remarks by President Obama, Former President Bill Clinton, and Former President George W. Bush on the 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.

WATCH THE VIDEO



January 16, 2010 1:19 PM

[Presidents Obama, Bush, & Clinton: Help for Haiti](#)



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.

PRESIDENT BUSH: I join President Obama in expressing my sympathy for the people of Haiti. I commend the President for his swift and timely response to the disaster. I am so pleased to answer the call to work alongside President Clinton to mobilize the compassion of the American people.

Like most Americans, Laura and I have been following the television coverage from Haiti. Our hearts are broken when we see the scenes of little children struggling without a mom or a dad, or the bodies in the streets or the physical damage of the earthquake.

The challenges down there are immense, but there's a lot of devoted people leading the relief effort, from government personnel who deployed into the disaster zone to the faith-based groups that have made Haiti a calling.

The most effective way for Americans to help the people of Haiti is to contribute money. That money will go to organizations on the ground and will be -- who will be able to effectively spend it. I know a lot of people want to send blankets or water -- just send your cash. One of the things that the President and I will do is to make sure your money is spent wisely. As President Obama said, you can look us up on clintonbushhaitifund.org.

The Haitian people have got a tough journey, yet it's amazing how terrible tragedies can bring out the best of the human spirit. We've all seen that firsthand when American citizens responded to the tsunami or to Katrina or to the earthquake in Pakistan. And President Clinton and I are going to work to tap that same spirit of giving to help our brothers and sisters in the Caribbean.

Toward the end of my presidency, Laura made a trip down to Haiti to look at the Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief programs down there. I remember clearly her coming back and telling me about the energy and optimism of the people of Haiti. There's just an unbelievable spirit amongst the Haitian people. And while that earthquake destroyed a lot, it didn't destroy their spirit.

So the people of Haiti will recovery and rebuild, and as they do they know they'll have a friend in the United States of America. Mr. President, thank you for giving me the chance to serve.

PRESIDENT CLINTON: First, I want to thank President Obama for asking President Bush and me to do this, and for what I believe has been a truly extraordinary response on the part of the American government. Because I've been working down there for nearly a year as the U.N. special envoy, I've been in constant touch with our people through the U.N. on the ground, and you know we lost a lot of our people there -- the largest loss of life in the history of the United Nations on a single day. The United States has been there from the beginning. The military has been great. The response by the State Department and AID has been great. I just can't say enough about it. And the people in Haiti know it, and I'm grateful.

Secondly, I'd like to thank President Bush for agreeing to do this, and for the concern he showed for Haiti. Before this happened, my foundation worked with the PEPFAR people on the AIDS problems in Haiti and I saw how good they were and what they did and how many lives they saved.

Finally, let me say that -- I don't have to read the Web site because they did -- but I want to say something about this. Right now all we need to do is get food and medicine and water and a secure place for them to be. But when we start the rebuilding effort, we want to do what I did with the President's father in the tsunami area. We want to be a place where people can know their money will be well spent; where we will ensure the ongoing integrity of the process.

And we want to stay with this over the long run. My job with the U.N. basically is not at all in conflict with this because I'm sort of the outside guy. My job is to work with the donor nations, the international agencies, the business people around the world to try to get them to invest there, the nongovernmental organizations, the Haitian diaspora community.

I believe before this earthquake Haiti had the best chance in my lifetime to escape its history -- a history that Hillary and I have shared a tiny part of. I still believe that. The Haitians want to just amend their development plan to take account of what's happened in Port-au-Prince and west, figure out what they got to do about that, and then go back to implementing it. But it's going to take a lot of help and a long time.

So I'm just grateful that President Bush wants to help, and I've already figured out how I can get him to do some things that he didn't sign on for. (Laughter.)

Again, I have no words to say what I feel like. When you -- I was in those hotels that collapsed. I had meals with people who are dead. The cathedral church that Hillary and I sat in 34 years ago is a total rubble. But what these men have said is true: It is still one of the most remarkable, unique places I have ever been. And they can escape their history and build a better future if we do our part. And President Obama, thank you for giving us a chance to do a little of that.

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Well, these gentlemen are going to do an extraordinary job, but really what they're going to be doing is just tapping into the incredible generosity, the ingenuity, the can-do spirit of the American people in helping our neighbors in need. So I want to thank each of them not only for being here today but what I know is going to be an extraordinary effort.

I want to make sure that everybody got that Web site one more time. Obviously we're just standing it up, but it will immediately give people a means to contact our offices -- www.clintonbushhaitifund.org.

And I just want to amplify one thing that was said. We were talking in the back. In any extraordinary catastrophe like this, the first several weeks are just going to involve getting immediate relief on the ground. And there are going to be some tough days over the next several days. People are still trying to figure out how to organize themselves. There's going to be fear, anxiety, a sense of desperation in some cases.

I've been in contact with President Préval. I've been talking to the folks on the ground. We are going to be making slow and steady progress, and the key now is to -- for everybody in Haiti to understand that there is going to be sustained help on the way.

But what these gentlemen are going to be able to do is when the news media starts seeing its attention drift to other things but there's still enormous needs on the ground, these two gentlemen of extraordinary stature I think are going to be able to help ensure that these efforts are sustained. And that's why it's so important and that's why I'm so grateful that they agreed to do it.

Thank you, gentlemen.

END

11:16 A.M. EST

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