

January 17th, 2010

**Haiti: Why I am recommending donations to *Doctors Without Borders*
(*Medecines Sans Frontieres*)**

On January 12th, 2010 a 7.0-magnitude earthquake struck Haiti, just west of the capital, Port-au-Prince. An earthquake of this size would have caused havoc in any Canadian city. In Haiti, it has unleashed a tragedy of unknown proportions.

Haiti already faced significant challenges; it is the poorest country in the Western hemisphere. Port-au-Prince was designed to house 250,000 people yet an estimated 2 million people live there. One in ten homes has been destroyed, leaving an estimated 200,000 people homeless. It is unknown how many people died in the earthquake with estimates ranging as high as 150,000.

Characteristically Canadians are responding with enormous generosity. Collections for the relief efforts in Haiti will collect hundreds of millions of dollars as individuals, corporations, and the Canadian government responds. Over the past week, friends and family have asked which charities I would recommend supporting to help Haiti.

I have no expertise on international programs or charities operating abroad. Yet from what I have read, I am recommending donations go to *Doctors Without Borders* for 3 reasons:

1. **Track record.** I believe how a charity has acted in the past is the best indicator of how it will respond today. Haiti's earthquake is a natural disaster similar to the Asian tsunami that struck in December 2004. In response to this, the Canadian Red Cross reportedly received \$360 million in donations. Three years later, it had yet to spend \$200 million (see reference article). Conversely, *Doctors Without Borders* also received millions in donations, but publically announced and contacted donors when it had received enough money to respond. Excess donations were given the opportunity to be reimbursed or re-directed. I applaud this contrarian approach. It recognizes that our giving is a scarce resource – not to be hoarded in investment accounts. I believe most donors want their giving today to help Haiti now and in the immediate future rather than three or more years down the road.
2. **Already on the ground in Port-au-Prince to scale up quickly.** I believe that charities that already have significant operations in Port-au-Prince specifically will be able to scale up quickly to deal with this disaster. With existing operations the charity will have a location, a network of partners, and critical local knowledge. Other charities looking to initiate programs will likely take more time to start up. *Doctors Without Borders* had 800 staff in Port-au-Prince when the earthquake hit. This is the largest charity presence, along with World Vision – at least four times larger than the other charities (see Table). Tragically many in the United Nations operations in Port-au-Prince were killed in the earthquake. *Doctors Without Borders'* hospitals suffered significant damage, but they were able to respond immediately with field clinics.

3. **Mission focus on humanitarian emergency relief.** All charities have noble causes. But in response to Haiti's needs I recommend donors focus on those with expertise in emergency response. The time for search and rescue has past. This is not a time to send a goat or sponsor a child, nor is it the time for long-term development projects like microcredit. This is the time for bulldozers, latrines, emergency shelters, medical and basic humanitarian needs. I would also recommend donating to charities that have a mission focus on working with the most people rather than a specific segment, like children. This is a time when everyone needs help, regardless of age.

The National Post published an article outlining some charities. I found this useful and have compiled the information into the following table.

| Charity Name (alphabetical) | Number of staff in Haiti prior to earthquake | Mission focus |
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| Canadian Red Cross www.redcross.ca | 3 | Mission: The Canadian Red Cross works overseas in cooperation with other members of the International Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement: 185 National Red Cross or Red Crescent Societies, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the International Committee of the Red Cross... We work in situations of war and natural disaster to bring urgently needed relief items, reunite families and help rebuild communities... supports and manages development and rehabilitation programs, ranging from primary health care to water sanitation. |
| CARE Canada http://care.ca | 133 | <i>CARE</i> Canada is a leading aid and development organization fighting global poverty through long-term development and emergency relief. Haiti focus: Food, shelter, sanitation. |
| Doctors Without Borders also know as Medecines Sans Frontieres http://www.msf.ca | 800 | Mission: the world's leading independent international medical relief organisation Haiti focus: Medical emergency |
| Habitat for Humanity http://www.habitat.ca | 15 (50) | Mission: At Habitat, we believe in making affordable housing accessible to working families who earn less than the low-income cut-off. Haiti focus: Has stockpiles of construction materials for short-term shelter kits. |
| OXFAM http://www.oxfam.ca/ | 200 | Mission: Oxfam Canada works with people to secure their basic human rights, combining support to long-term development and humanitarian responses with research, advocacy and campaigning against the root causes of poverty and injustice. Haiti focus: Emergency aid, delivery of shovels and picks, priority access to water. |

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| Salvation Army http://www.salvationarmy.ca/ | 50 | Mission: The Salvation Army exists to share the love of Jesus Christ, meet human needs and be a transforming influence in the communities of our world. Haiti focus: Food, water and basic medical attention |
| Save the Children http://www.savethechildren.ca/ | 170 | Mission: Save the Children fights for children's rights. We deliver immediate and lasting improvements to children's lives worldwide. Haiti focus: Providing safe spaces for children and reuniting families. In addition hygiene kits, nutritional supplements, medical supplies |
| UNICEF (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund) http://www.unicef.ca | 44 | UNICEF has direct working relations with government ministries, community leaders and policy makers in more than 150 countries and territories... UNICEF believes that the survival, protection and development of children must be a global priority, and that every child has the right to health, education, equality and protection. Haiti focus: delivery of water, sanitation, 10,000 tents and therapeutic food designed for children. |
| World Vision http://www.worldvision.ca | 800 | World Vision is a Christian relief, development and advocacy organization dedicated to working with children, families and communities to overcome poverty and injustice Haiti: Top priority child safety. World Vision will establish safe spaces for vulnerable children in Haiti. |

Note: The National Post article quotes the percentage of funds spent on administration and fundraising. I calculate fundraising costs differently, analysing full costs whereas most charities report fundraising costs net of expenses. My calculation rarely matches what the charity reports. I believe these statements are not meaningful. Donors should focus on the work achieved and the results. For example a charity would have very low administrative costs if the dollars never got to work.

References: Brennan, Richard "Red Cross yet to spend \$200M of tsunami cash", Toronto Star, March 3, 2008 <http://www.thestar.com/printarticle/308788>

"How to give" National Post, January 16, 2010
<http://www.nationalpost.com/news/story.html?id=2448313>

These are my personal thoughts from public sources. I have not done any analysis of the financial statements or had management interviews with any of these international charities. I am in exactly the same boat as most donors at this time – taking a best guess on how to help and praying.

I hope this information and my thoughts can help you make an informed giving decision.

Sincerely,

Kate Bahen