

Earthquake in Haiti may have killed 'over 100,000'

Haitian Prime Minister Jean-Max Bellerive said "well over" 100,000 people may have died in Tuesday's earthquake, as the United Nations and relief groups rushed aid to the Western Hemisphere's poorest country.

Bellerive said he based his estimate on reports of the number of buildings that collapsed with people inside, adding the extent of casualties is largely guesswork at this point. About 70,000 people were killed in the hemisphere's worst earthquake on record, which hit Peru in 1970, the US Geological Survey said on its Web site.

"I believe that we are well over 100,000. I hope that is not true because I hope people had the time to get out," Bellerive said in a telephone interview with CNN. "We have so many people in the street and we don't know exactly where they were living. But there are so many buildings, so many neighborhoods totally destroyed and in some neighborhoods we don't even see people so I don't know where those people are."

President Rene Preval told the Miami Herald that the country was "destroyed" by the temblor, which was centered 10 miles (16 kilometers) southwest of Port-au-Prince, a city of about 2 million, at 4:53 pm local time yesterday. The Associated Press said bodies are heaped along streets amid the rubble from thousands of collapsed structures. The corpses of small children were piled outside schools as flies began to gather, the AP said.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon said he released \$10 million from the world body's emergency relief fund to speed aid to Haiti. He also asked the US for heavy equipment and rescue teams. Promises of additional aid came from countries including the UK, Canada, Brazil, Germany and the Netherlands, which pledged 2 million euros (\$2.9 million) in emergency aid.

President Barack Obama ordered US agencies to undertake a "swift, coordinated" effort to get aid to Haiti. Search-and-rescue teams, four US Coast Guard cutters and an aircraft carrier are en route, while the administration works to account for US government employees and citizens.

Port-au-Prince is in "total chaos" with clouds of dust from collapsed buildings covering the city, said Robyn Fieser, a spokeswoman with the Catholic Relief Services in Baltimore. The quake, with at least 13 aftershocks with a magnitude above 4.5, was the "most violent" in the Port-au-Prince area in more than a hundred years, according to the USGS.

"Buildings have collapsed everywhere and there is rubble blocking the roads," Sophie Perez, the director of the relief organization CARE, said in a statement.

The UN said clean water is in short supply, that the National Palace was destroyed and that "hotels, hospitals, schools and the national penitentiary have all suffered extensive damage."

Economic damage may be in the hundreds of millions of dollars, according to estimates from Eqecat Inc., an Oakland, California-based company that builds financial risk models to help insurers prepare for catastrophes.

Delta Air Lines Inc. and AMR Corp.'s American Airlines both suspended service indefinitely after the quake left the Port-au-Prince air-traffic control tower out of commission, company spokesmen said. JetBlue Airways Corp. said flights were operating as scheduled to the neighboring Dominican Republic.

Haiti's population of 9.6 million has a per capita income of about \$560, with 54 percent of Haitians living on less than \$1 a day and 78 percent on less than \$2 daily, according to the World Bank. The gross domestic product was \$7 billion in 2008. The country is still recovering from four tropical storms or hurricanes that killed at least 800 people in 2008.

"For a country and a people who are no strangers to hardship and suffering, this tragedy seems especially cruel and incomprehensible," Obama said today.

The apparel sector accounts for about two-thirds of Haiti's exports and nearly one-tenth of the nation's economy, according to data from the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency. Remittances are the primary source of foreign exchange, equaling nearly a quarter of gross domestic product and more than twice the earnings from exports such as coffee and mangoes, the CIA said.

Eqecat estimated that as many as 2 million people may be affected by the earthquake and aftershocks, the company said in a note to clients last night.

Pope Benedict XVI appealed to "everyone's generosity" in a call for financial aid for Haiti today in Rome. The body of Archbishop Joseph Serge Miot, 63, was found in the ruins of his office in Port-au-Prince, said the Rev. Pierre Le Beller of the Saint Jacques Missionary Center in Landivisiau, France, according to the AP.

Twenty-one members of a delegation of three Trenton, New Jersey, churches in Haiti for five days to set up a medical clinic are among those missing, said Skip Conover, a church volunteer from the Presbyterian Church of Lawrenceville. The group, which also included members of Shiloh Baptist Church in Trenton and Kingdom Church in Ewing, was scheduled to arrive in Port-au-Prince at 1 p.m., about three hours prior to the temblor, and depart for the mountain town of Thoman, he said.

"We've heard absolutely nothing from them," Conover said in a telephone interview from the church, about five miles north of the state capital of Trenton. "We don't know what the situation is right now."

The heads of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund said they are prepared to assess damage and provide aid. World Bank offices in Port-au-Prince "were destroyed but most staff have been safely accounted for," the bank's president, Robert Zoellick, said in a statement.

Citigroup Inc.'s three-story office building in the capital collapsed and the bank is trying to account for its 44 employees, said Liliana Mejia, a spokeswoman for the New York-based bank. Bank of Nova Scotia, Canada's third-largest bank by assets, said all 80 of its employees in Haiti are safe and accounted for.

The UN, which has a peacekeeping force of about 7,000 personnel and 2,000 police in Haiti, said its offices were damaged and that a "large amount of personnel" are unaccounted for. The UN force has been stationed there since June 2004, after President Bertrand Aristide left the country to go into exile.

Brazil, which has 1,266 troops in Haiti to support UN peacekeeping, said 11 service members are dead and seven missing.

Florida Governor Charlie Crist authorized the state's emergency management office to provide food, water, tents, blankets, cots and other equipment from its stockpile of hurricane supplies.

"We maintain a warehouse of supplies for disasters in Orlando that could be made available and we're ready to roll if needed," said spokesman Mike Stone.

A school with children in its rooms collapsed in Port-au-Prince, according to the UN Children's Fund, Unicef. The aid group Doctors Without Borders, or Medecins sans Frontieres, said in a statement that its 60-bed hospital in Port-au-Prince was seriously damaged.

More than 100 workers from Unicef in Haiti are helping the injured and providing for children separated from their parents, said Caryl Stern, the president of the US fund of Unicef in New York.

"It's a really densely populated area. It couldn't be worse," said Stern, who has been in contact with Unicef workers in Haiti. "It's going to take a big world effort."