



CARE Works With Women in Haiti to Keep Disease at Bay *Humanitarian Group Teaches Water Purification Techniques after Quake*

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (Jan. 18, 2010) – CARE’s disaster-response teams find themselves in a race against time in earthquake-ravaged Haiti, coaching survivors how to purify contaminated water and preparing hygiene kits to help prevent a secondary crisis: the outbreak of disease.

The Haitian capital lacks sewer infrastructure. And the massive quake ruptured water lines, creating a perfect formula for the spread of water-borne disease, particularly as those left homeless are forced into close quarters with limited options for sanitation.

Safe water is crucial for every survivor of Tuesday’s quake – but especially for pregnant women, new mothers, and small children, said Dr. Franck Geneus, coordinator of CARE’s health program in Haiti. Some 37,000 pregnant women in the disaster zone are in desperate need of food, clean drinking water and/or access to health care. “We are concerned that women may stop breastfeeding because they do not have enough food or water themselves,” Geneus said. “That poses a huge risk to newborns.”

Dr. Geneus and other CARE staffers have hit the streets to give women a crash course in using the 600,000 water-purification packets CARE is distributing in Port-au-Prince. CARE shows them how to empty the powder into buckets, wait for solids to form and strain the clumps out with cloth. In minutes, filthy brown water turns sparkling clear. Each packet can purify 10 litres of water, enough for one person to drink safely for four days.

“CARE staff train local volunteers, so they can teach others and distribute the packets according to a careful inventory of families at the site – to be sure it reaches those most in need,” he explained. “It’s the quickest way to reach the most people.”

But to use the powder, called PUR, requires two 20-litre containers – one for dirty water, the other for clean. And many here don’t even have a bucket to their name, said Sophie Perez, CARE’s country director in Haiti.

“We will distribute the PUR along with hygiene kits in the coming days, packed into large buckets that people can use,” Perez said. “The kits will also contain crucial items, from soap to sanitary napkins, to help survivors stay healthy under these appalling conditions.”

Mounting garbage adds to the risk, Perez said from the edge of Port-au-Prince, in Pétionville. There, overflowing garbage trucks stand idle and the gutters are clogged with plastic bags, bottles and trash of all kinds. People tie handkerchiefs over their faces, desperately trying to stem the overwhelming stench. “We urgently need to address the waste disposal issue,” Perez said. “If that garbage keeps accumulating, it will certainly spread disease.”

CARE has launched a \$10 million appeal for a three-year emergency relief and recovery program for the affected population. CARE’s more than 130 staff in Haiti includes emergency personnel who were part of the response to the devastating Hurricane Hanna in 2008. In Haiti, CARE’s programs focus on governance, HIV/AIDS, reproductive health, maternal and child health, education, food security, and water and sanitation.

The scale of devastation caused by Tuesday's earthquake in Haiti is horrifying. Aid workers point to logistical challenges of securing and distributing aid and supplies because of severely impacted staff, damage to the airport and port, and security concerns. Electricity and water have been cut off, fuel supplies are low, and roads are damaged, further hampering efforts.

Despite these challenges, aid is getting through, and more emergency workers and aid shipments are arriving regularly. In addition to the water purification packets, CARE will soon distribute food rations, tents, mattresses and basic hygiene kits.

CARE, which focuses on empowering women and girls as part of our global fight against poverty, has partnered with other organizations to meet the urgent needs of pregnant and lactating women left particularly vulnerable after the earthquake. CARE has extensive ongoing health programs in Haiti, and will coordinate with the local government to rebuild their health capacity.

CARE knows that in emergencies like this, women and girls are at increased risk of sexual violence, exploitation and abuse when seeking food and other services. CARE and its partners will address gender-specific needs in Haiti. We are working out the particulars of this now.

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CARE Australia has launched an emergency appeal to support survivors. **Your help is urgently needed.**

Your donation will enable emergency response teams to distribute food, safe water, temporary shelter and emergency supplies to families affected by the earthquake.