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The cry for help from Haiti

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The images on our television screens from Haiti have been nothing short of horrific.

Much of Port-au-Prince, the capital of the small Caribbean nation, was reduced to rubble by a devastating earthquake Tuesday, Jan. 12. The number of fatalities is unknown, with estimates ranging as high as 200,000. Because of the urgent need to remove corpses from streets and destroyed buildings for health reasons, the number probably will never be known.

What is known is that people are still dying.

Hundreds of thousands of survivors of the earthquake – including countless children and elderly – are struggling to stay alive in a hellish nightmare. Water, food, shelter and medical supplies are severely lacking, and Haiti's infrastructure, substandard before the earthquake damage, is stranding many survivors as the first international aid trickles in. Even as resources begin to pour in from around the world, there are tremendous difficulties in getting them to people who desperately need them.

Before the earthquake it was estimated that only 40 percent of the residents in this impoverished nation of 9.8 million had access to basic health care. It's expected many of the injured will die simply because they cannot get medical assistance.

America is taking a leading role in coordinating rescue and relief efforts. Despite our own economic problems, President Obama has promised \$100,000 million in immediate aid. We have also sent in the military to assist relief workers in an increasingly chaotic and dangerous environment.

Major disaster relief agencies, including the American Red Cross, were quickly on the scene and are doing their best to help.

Christy Hodde, executive director of the Madison-based Colonial Crossroads Chapter of the Red Cross, reported the generosity of residents "has been tremendous." While some have sought to donate clothes, medical supplies or canned goods, Hodde said the most effective way to help is a donation to the Red Cross International Response Fund, which specializes in relief operations overseas. Donors can phone 1-800-RED-CROSS, or 1-800-257-7575 for Spanish speakers, or visit www.redcross.org. Donations also can be mailed to: American Red Cross, P.O. Box 37243, Washington, D.C. 20013, or the Colonial Crossroads Chapter, 695 Springfield Ave., Summit, N.J. 07901. Donors are asked to designate: AP 2885, Haiti Relief and Development.

Mobile phone users also can text "Haiti" to 90999 to send a \$10 donation to the Red Cross. By Thursday, Jan. 14, more than \$3 million had been raised that way, and the Red Cross continues to accept donations from mobile phone users.

Now through Sunday, Jan. 31, Stop & Shop supermarkets are collecting donations on behalf of the Red Cross International Response Fund. The Stop & Shop Supermarket in Madison is located at 133 Main St.

More collections for Haiti relief can be expected, although police are advising caution by verifying the legitimacy of nonprofits, as past tragedies have prompted acts of criminal fraud and identify theft.

Haitians are a proud people who have undergone crushing hardships over the centuries. The island nation has been occupied by many other countries and embroiled in bloody wars, including its own battle for independence in 1804. It is said to be the only nation born of a slave revolt.

Still recovering from hurricanes last year, it is the poorest nation in the western hemisphere, and the latest natural disaster will only ensure that the agony continues for years to come.

Many have fled Haiti's terrible conditions, with an estimated 600,000 Haitians living in the United States alone. New Jersey is home to many.

Today, and clearly in the future, the people of Haiti need our help. We ask that everyone donate generously to help ease their tremendous suffering.

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