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Postal infrastructure must be part of reconstruction plans for Haiti Postal service will be an important motor of economic recovery, says the head of the United Nations agency for postal services

On the day Montreal is set to host an international conference to discuss the rebuilding of the devastated country, the United Nations specialized agency for postal services urges participants to remember the postal sector in the rebuilding of network infrastructures.

“The postal infrastructure is an important motor of all national economies,” says Edouard Dayan, director general of the Universal Postal Union. “Haitians need effective postal services to be able to receive and send mail and goods as well as make financial transactions, including money transfers. The UPU is talking with its member countries about the aid to be given to Haiti to rebuild and modernize its postal services, which were severely affected, like other sectors, by the earthquake of January 12.”

Infrastructure destroyed

Except for three post offices in outlying areas of Port-au-Prince, most of the nine postal buildings in the Haitian capital were completely destroyed by the earthquake, including the Post’s head office and its main sorting centre, according to local postal authorities. These installations provided work for 350 people. Postal buildings also collapsed in Miragoâne, Grand-Goâve and Petit-Goâve, according to Margarete Emile, director general of the Haitian Post.

Nationally, there are 60 post offices in Haiti employing 600 people. According to UPU data, the Haitian Post in 2007 processed 675,000 international letter-post items and 5,000 parcels. It also manages more than 161,000 postal savings accounts.

Offers to help rebuild the Haitian Post are pouring in daily at the UPU from the world’s Posts. A task force set up at the UPU’s International Bureau – the Union’s secretariat – is coordinating international assistance being offered by member countries and their designated postal operators. Members of the task force include postal officials from the American, Canadian, Dominican, French, Haitian and Spanish Posts, as well as representatives from regional postal organizations such as the Postal Union of the Americas, Spain and Portugal and the Caribbean Postal Union.

“In the aftermath of the catastrophe, we have an opportunity to help Haiti Post rebuild but also modernize its operations and activities so that it can play an even more important role in revitalizing the economy, which is essential to the country’s recovery,” adds Dayan. “With close to one million Haitians living in the United States, 130,000 in Canada, 80,000 in France and so many more elsewhere, setting up efficient postal services in Haiti will contribute to stimulating the economy and alleviating inhabitants’ difficulties.”

Posts mobilize

At this moment, the postal service in Haiti is completely paralyzed. The UPU and its member countries are studying the best scenarios for jump-starting postal services as soon as possible.

A team of postal inspectors from the United States will travel to Port-au-Prince this week to help postal officials there secure the mail trapped in the rubble and at the airport when the earthquake struck and evaluate the needs in view of resuming postal exchanges with the world.

On site and abroad, Posts are doing what they can for Haiti. UPU member countries are offering financial assistance to help rebuild the Post as well as equipment ranging from vehicles to sorting equipment. Germany's Deutsche Post DHL has deployed its emergency response team based at the Port-au-Prince airport. France's La Poste last week issued a postage stamp to raise money for the French Red Cross. Other Posts, including those of Canada, Spain and Mauritius, are also working with the Red Cross nationally. Canada Post will soon send to Haiti nine postal vans bearing the latter's national colours.

About the UPU

Created in 1874, the UPU, based in Berne (Switzerland), is an intergovernmental organization and the primary forum for cooperation between governments, Posts and other stakeholders of the worldwide postal sector. In addition to maintaining a genuinely universal network that provides modern products and services, it establishes the rules for international mail exchanges among its 191 members and makes recommendations to stimulate mail volume growth and to improve the quality of service for customers. Some 5.5 million employees process and deliver 433 billion domestic letter-post items annually, as well as some 5.5 billion international items and over 6 billion parcels. Many postal services also offer expedited mail, financial and electronic services. About 660,000 postal establishments make the postal network the largest physical distribution network in the world. The UPU celebrated 60 years as a specialized agency of the United Nations in 2008.

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