

U.S., Haiti Partner for Reconstruction

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Body

Washington -- Vice President **Biden** led a team of U.S. government officials in meetings with Haitian-American leaders ahead of the one-year anniversary of Haiti's devastating earthquake to discuss the "unprecedented challenges that remain for recovery and reconstruction efforts."

According to a January 7 White House statement, **Biden's** meeting "underscored the important work the United States and our international partners have engaged upon in partnership with the Haitian people since last year's devastating earthquake" and highlighted "the United States' lasting commitment to Haiti."

A key area of cooperation between the U.S. and Haitian governments has been in providing food for those affected by the disaster.

"After the earthquake, we worked quickly to scale up food aid distributions, initially to 3 million and eventually to 4 million people," said Jonathan Dworken, deputy director of the U.S. Agency for International Development's Office of Food for Peace.

Dworken said during a phone briefing that USAID's efforts began with universal food distributions and later transitioned to more targeted assistance focusing on children and pregnant women.

"Then, as food became available in the markets, we provided food vouchers and instituted cash-for-work programs. Underlying this approach is that by undertaking these programs, we're able to not just help Haitian families meet their food needs, but also support the recovery of local markets."

Patricia Haslach, who oversees the State Department's Feed the Future program, also emphasized the importance of food and agriculture in supporting Haiti's overall recovery.

"We recognize that food security isn't only about food -- it's also closely linked to economic security, environmental security and human security," she said. The Feed the Future initiative, she added, works closely with the Haitian government, as well as local nongovernmental organizations, to create sustainable progress.

Cheryl Mills, counselor and chief of staff to Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, praised progress in Haiti, but said more work is needed.

She said during a news briefing with USAID Administrator Rajiv Shah that more than 1 million people are still living in tents nearly one year after the earthquake, which killed at least 200,000 people and injured more than 300,000.

Shah, who has coordinated the U.S. response, said the success of the recovery and reconstruction effort "will depend on both the deep partnership with the government and people and institutions of Haiti and our collective will and commitment to see the effort through."

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"In that spirit, we've taken a number of steps to try to put in place the innovations in how we work to make sure that we're really capturing the opportunities of the moment to **build back better** even in a very difficult environment," Shah said.

He added that the U.S. government has partnered with Haitian companies to develop improved construction standards and to be part of the reconstruction work, "thereby creating jobs ... and also creating a more vibrant local economy that's capable of sustaining and seeing through the overall reconstruction and recovery effort."

He emphasized that the United States remains committed to being "good partners with the people and government of Haiti" as they work together toward long-term recovery and rebuilding.

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