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Comments to the press by Vice President/High Representative Catherine Ashton on the situation in Haiti

Brussels, 14 January 2010

«Let me begin by saying once again that the thoughts of people all over Europe are with the victims of this terrible tragedy and with their families.

I know that the scenes of devastation and suffering we have seen have moved us all. I for one am determined to do everything I can to translate that emotion that we all feel into action. Our goal now must be to work to help those who need it most.

Our thoughts are with the people of Haiti who have suffered enormously and lost so many of their loved ones. There is also a large number of EU citizens who are unaccounted for. We also know that the United Nations have suffered terrible losses and I have expressed my condolences earlier today to Ban Ki Moon the UN Secretary General. But also the EU Delegation in Port-au-Prince is still missing one person.

We must show, as we have done in the past, that we are indeed a 'global community', able to find the resources needed to save lives and to rebuild existences.

The European Union, through its member states and common resources, has already acted. We will continue to do so, finding additional resources and delivering them as quickly as possible.

We are working closely together on the humanitarian relief side with the Member States. A number of Member States, in particular Belgium, France and Spain, but many others too, have sent teams and material, such as water purification, field

hospitals and tents. The first teams have arrived and are active in search and rescue operations.

We are also closely working together between the different Commission services and the Council. I met Karel de Gucht and Stavros Dimas earlier today to discuss the activities and next steps. Our teams are coordinating their efforts so that we can deliver a quick and efficient response.

The Monitoring and Information Centre was activated in the night of 12 January, and a team of 4 experts from Italy, Estonia, Austria and the UK plus a MIC liaison officer has been deployed with a Belgian B-Fast team and is about to land in Port-au-Prince. A French expert and another from the Spanish Presidency will join the team tomorrow.

Numerous offers of European assistance are on their way. The UK sent an urban search and rescue team yesterday. A French search and rescue team arrived in Haiti today, 14 January. The Belgian plane with an assessment and coordination team together with specialised teams from Luxembourg is about to land in Port-au-Prince.

Within hours of the disaster, the European Commission's humanitarian department provided 3 million Euros in an initial, emergency humanitarian aid response. This money is channelled through our international humanitarian partners – such as the UN relief agencies and the International Red Cross family – to ensure life-saving supplies get to the people of Haiti right now. Namely: first aid medicines; water; food; and tents.

We are now putting all the different elements together that are at our disposal: Humanitarian relief, civil protection, but also other instruments that as satellite images provided by our Global Monitoring System (GMES) that are important for the coordination of the UN efforts on the ground.

But it is not only about the immediate help for the humanitarian disaster. We also have started to work on our assistance that we can give to the people of Haiti in the medium- and long-term. To that end, the Commission has two of its own humanitarian relief experts "on the ground" able to provide an analysis of the needs of our humanitarian partners (such as the International Red Cross) to ensure the stricken population get the help they need quickly.

I have asked the Spanish Development Minister to convene a meeting of EU Development Ministers on Monday to take this forward.

The coordination with international partners is crucial now. I have spoken earlier today with the UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon and offered our immediate support. And I come off the phone with U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

It is important to tell the people of Haiti that we stand ready to help them as much as we can in this tragedy. They can count on Europe. »

For more information on:

-the EU coordinated response to the humanitarian crisis in Haiti:

http://ec.europa.eu/echo/index_en.htm

-the European Civil Protection:

<http://www.acceptance.ec.europa.eu/environment/civil/index.htm>

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