

UNMIT memorial in honour of victims of the Haiti earthquake – 13 January
2011

SRSG statement

We gather here today to remember the terrible earthquake of 12 January 2010 that devastated Haiti and claimed over 200,000 lives including 102 of our own colleagues. On that traumatic day, the lives of some 13,000,000 Haitians were changed forever.

Let us pay homage to the victims. Let us pay tribute to the survivors' courage and let us acknowledge the commitment and compassion of all involved in the emergency relief effort that unfolded in the painful days that followed.

The earthquake, which measured 7.0 on the Richter scale occurred at 16:53 Haitian time on 12 January 2010.

According to Haitian Government estimates, upwards of 230,000 people died, 300,000 were injured and 1 million were made homeless by the earthquake.

The United Nations lost 102 staff members including 21 national staff, 24 military, 16 UNPOL and 39 International staff plus two UN Volunteers.

The collapse of the UN Mission Headquarters caused the death of most of the mission's senior managers, including SRSG Hedi Annabi and DSRSG Luiz Carlos da Costa.

This death toll constituted the highest number of UN staff casualties from a single event in the Organization's history.

In the immediate aftermath, the international community, the UN system, national and local leadership, and humanitarian organisations everywhere struggled to come to grips with the scale of the devastation and to mount an appropriate response to a disaster of almost unprecedented proportions.

All of our Haitian colleagues including those serving in this mission today had family and friends who suffered grievous losses. Many of us here today had friends and colleagues among the UN staff members who died or were injured or unaccounted for in the smouldering ruins and razed buildings in Port au Prince and elsewhere.

Moved by the plight of the victims and the horrendous scenes seen on TV screens around the world, many from UNMIT promptly volunteered their services. I am proud to say that at one point, some 17 UNMIT staff members were serving with the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) on TDY. The same was true of UN staff and UN missions around the world.

The UN family was as one in its grief and in its response. None of us will forget the long and anxious wait for news of survivors. None of us will forget the numb sadness when the news came that those who had been missing had not survived.

This commemoration this morning is one more manifestation of our recognition of the supreme sacrifice of our colleagues on that terrible day. It is also an occasion when we can show our ongoing solidarity with the long suffering people of Haiti.

MINUSTAH continues to work with the Government of Haiti in the areas of humanitarian assistance, security, rule of law, elections and disaster preparedness. In the early days after the earthquake, MINUSTAH helped with the distribution of emergency shelters to over 1.5 million people and food to 4.3 million Haitians. As if Haitians had not suffered enough, they have since had to face a cholera epidemic.

Today, the Mission continues to support the Government in the very complex task of national transformation, while helping ensure that all Haitians have a chance to shape their future through the democratic process.

Unprecedented challenges remain but together we can overcome. That is the ultimate tribute we can pay to those who died in the earthquake.