

The New York Times

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February 6, 2010

Bill Clinton, in Haiti, Emphasizes Urgent Need for Sanitation and Health Care

By [IAN URBINA](#)

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti — Former President [Bill Clinton](#), who is the [United Nations](#) special envoy to [Haiti](#), returned here on Friday to meet with government and aid officials, visit a health clinic and deliver medical supplies, computers and generators.

Mr. Clinton praised the progress being made in the relief effort, especially in addressing the need for food, shelter and security, but he expressed a growing sense of urgency about the country's requirements for sanitation and health care.

“We learned a lot from the tsunami relief effort, and the United Nations and the international community worked in a far more coordinated fashion this time,” he said while touring the Gheskio health clinic in the Bicentenaire neighborhood. “But we can still do better, and one of the areas that I think we have to improve is sanitation.”

To prepare for future disasters, Mr. Clinton said he planned to suggest that the United Nations consider stockpiling latrines and other sanitation supplies in disaster- or conflict-prone areas around the world, much as it already does with medical supplies, food and water.

He said he believed that the United Nations and the international community needed to devise plans for handling natural disasters and conduct practice exercises to improve coordination and diminish response time.

Mr. Clinton was given the added responsibility on Wednesday of overseeing United Nations aid efforts and reconstruction in Haiti after [the magnitude 7 earthquake that devastated Port-au-Prince](#), the capital, and surrounding areas on Jan. 12.

Dr. [Paul Farmer](#), the deputy special envoy to Haiti who toured the clinic with Mr. Clinton, said: “For sanitation and health, the key is going to be to create community-based solutions, which basically means hire Haitians and lots of them to begin tracking infectious diseases, doing follow-up on treatments, as well as building latrines and water infrastructure. It shouldn't be seen as some radical notion that we need to inject the money into the Haitian population, because they

are the ones who can actually do the follow up.”

United Nations officials echoed the concerns over sanitation and health.

“The rainy season is going to make our sanitation problems become our water problems if we don’t find a way to get more latrines built,” said Souleymane Sow, coordinator for [Unicef](#)’s water, sanitation and health cluster. “The rain will wash the waste into the area where people are living and may cause people to become very sick.”

More than 900 pit or trench latrines have been dug. But sanitation facilities are still needed for more than 950,000 people, Mr. Sow said. He added that more donations of services and latrines were still needed from sanitation companies in the United States.

At a sweltering encampment on Toussaint Louverture Boulevard, about a mile from the Port-au-Prince airport, Pierre Toutiane nodded in agreement about the need for more latrines. He stood in his shanty, which is crowded on three sides by other shanties and which opens on the fourth side onto a gully flowing with human waste.

Just inches from the gully, Mr. Toutiane’s 3-year-old son, Christian, lay on the shanty’s dirt floor.

“Every day that trench gets wider and closer to us,” Mr. Toutiane said. “But we have no place else to go.”

United Nations officials said they were making great progress in other areas, having provided some water or food to a total of one million people. More than 338,000 people received two-week rations of rice over the past three days, they said.

Health officials have performed more than 1,000 amputations, but more physical therapists are needed for post-operative care, they said.

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