

Bill Blaney just arrives back in Haiti and shares his initial thoughts from the ground

Saturday Feb. 6, 2010

Again I visited the large IDP camp opposite the collapsed, Presidential Palace, its back broken and crown shattered by the massive earthquake. This once beautiful structure, a symbol of pride for the Government, an image of the state to the people, lives destroyed, symbolic of the broken and shattered lives of its people.

There are vast numbers of new people that have set up makeshift shelters in this sprawling encampment. As I walked through the thousands of makeshift shelters made from sheets, pieces of wood and tin, salvaged from the many collapsed buildings, several thoughts, driven by images, smells and shared stories from the people living it hour by hour, day by day, week by week filled my mind.

The first thought that strikes me is that these thousands of people have set up shelter in the midst of a graveyard, whose bodies have been buried under tons of debris and not yet removed from the rubble. While you cannot always see the presence of the dead, you can't escape the smell of the dead.

"Why set up your shelter in the midst of this burial place?" I asked an older lady Madame Antonie. Her response was that her house had collapsed killing her six children. Only Antonie and her husband had survived. He was away trying to find food. They were there because many people they knew were there, this was now her community, "I have no children now and I have nowhere else to go."

I asked her what was her hope in the midst of such tragedy and she said that she had none.

I asked if she had received any help. She said that they had been given only one small portion of rice. She said that at the distribution they were not treated as human beings, but rather as dogs. Antonie said, "we are human, why can't we be treated that way?"

The next thought I had was how would it feel to lose all sense of privacy, with nowhere to go, and that people could see you or watch you. I think that would be very difficult.

Finally, who is willing to help these people, giving them hope, restoring their dignity, and giving them peace in the midst of the storm? You can, by partnering with GAIN and through the local network on the ground.

Can you help?

Check out www.globalaid.net on how you can get involved.

Bill Blaney