

The Office of Refugee Resettlement



Photo courtesy of DHS

Dear friends and colleagues,

In addition to providing benefits and services to refugees and other vulnerable populations, the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) is also responsible for overseeing the U.S. Repatriation Program. This program was established in 1935 to provide temporary assistance to U.S. citizens and their dependents who are identified by the U.S. Department of State as having returned, or been brought, from a foreign country to the U.S. because of a crisis and who are without immediate access to necessary resources to cover their transition back into the U.S.

When the 7.0 magnitude earthquake struck Haiti one month ago, it devastated most of the country. U.S. federal agencies – including the U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services (HHS), State (DOS), and Homeland Security (DHS) – were immediately mobilized, as was ORR, the U.S. military, state agencies, and voluntary organizations.

During the past month, almost 1,100 flights have evacuated more than 26,000 people – the vast majority of whom are American citizens – who were in Haiti when the earthquake struck. Over 25,000 arrived in Florida.

Emergency repatriation centers were set up at Miami International Airport (FL), Homestead Air Reserve Base (FL), Sanford International Airport (FL), McGuire Air Force Base (NJ), Andrews Air Force Base (MD), and Charleston International Airport (SC).

Upon arrival to the U.S., almost 7,500 American citizens received HHS/ACF/ORR-funded

repatriation services, including payments for onward travel to final destinations, cash loans, clothing, lodging, and in some cases, medical care. Such assistance is given to eligible individuals in the form of a loan to be repaid to the U.S. Government.

In addition to overseeing the repatriation operation, ORR is also working closely with DHS on the issue of unaccompanied Haitian children who are entering the U.S. If DHS determines that a child has a legal guardian (e.g., a court has issued a final adoption decree), then the child is released to the legal guardian once all of the parties' identities and statuses have been verified.

Unaccompanied Haitian children who have been matched with an adoptive family, but who do not yet have legal guardians, are placed in the custody of ORR. ORR is working around the clock to ensure the safety and well-being of these unaccompanied Haitian children. Over 400 children have been reunited with sponsors and approximately 20 currently reside in ORR-funded facilities.

ORR would like to take this opportunity to thank all of its partners, including the U.S. military, the Departments of State and Homeland Security, HHS and ACF emergency response units, ACF regional staff, state repatriation coordinators, local volunteer agencies, and the states of Florida, Maryland, New Jersey, and South Carolina. They provided far more than just meals and water to repatriates who walked off the planes – they provided hope.

ORR would also like to commend Florida's Department of Children and Families and its Emergency Management Agency for continuing to work tirelessly to help those in need.

Our hard work can be epitomized in the words of an American citizen who was recently repatriated and received HHS/ACF/ORR-funded assistance. After being reunited with her daughter in Florida, the elderly woman exclaimed, "I have never felt so proud to be an American."

With great appreciation,

Eskinder Negash, Director of ORR