

Taiwanese rescuers shine in Haiti

Written by Taipei Times
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The first Taiwanese search and rescue squad has rescued two people since Sunday during operations in the earthquake-ravaged Caribbean nation of Haiti.

The first survivor, a French citizen, was a security guard at the UN Peacekeeping Force's police dormitory.

He had been buried under rubble for five days before being rescued.

Chen Shun-tien, one of the Taiwanese squad leaders, said the survivor was in good shape overall and could speak, although he seemed weak.

RESCUE

Chen said the Taiwanese team rushed to the site of the collapsed police dormitory after receiving an emergency notice from the UN post-quake relief coordination center that gunshots were heard coming from the rubble, which seemed to indicate that a survivor or survivors were trapped underneath the building.

With the assistance of sniffer dogs and sonar equipment, the Taiwanese squad identified the location of the survivor and a US search and rescue team pitched in with heavy-duty excavation equipment.

At one point, there was some disagreement between the Taiwanese and US rescue squads over which excavation method should be used, but they soon resolved the matter and the survivor was rescued through a smoothly coordinated effort.

A Salvadoran search and rescue team also joined the operation.

PRAISE

The Taiwanese squad's performance was praised by the US and Salvadoran teams.

A representative of the US team expressed his admiration for the Taiwanese crew and described the mission as a perfect example of teamwork.

Lisandro Alvarenga, head of the Salvadoran team, also said the operation was a wonderful event.

"Nothing is happier than rescuing a survivor," he told CNA.

Alvarenga attributed the success to the Taiwanese squad's accurate mapping of the survivor's location.

The second survivor, rescued today by the Taiwanese team, was Haitian.

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The Taiwanese team reached the Haitian capital of Port-au-Prince on Saturday after a long wait in the neighboring Dominican Republic because of air traffic congestion.

After its arrival in Haiti at 1pm on Saturday, the team immediately joined the search for survivors.

The team of 14 specialists, two sniffer dogs and 2,000kg of equipment and medical supplies, including life detectors, reported to a UN coordination center to share assignments after responding to a call by the Republic of China (ROC) embassy in Haiti to search the collapsed central government building to determine whether anyone was still alive beneath the mountains of rubble.

Since their arrival in Haiti, some members of the team have provided medical services to the wounded.

FRENCH IDEA

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said yesterday it remained non-committal to a French suggestion that it reduce Haiti's debt as a means to help it in its post-earthquake relief work, saying Taiwan had already launched several humanitarian projects in Haiti and was firmly committed to reconstruction efforts.

Ministry spokesman Henry Chen (陳亨) said Taiwan was engaged in several humanitarian projects in Haiti and cash loans was only one of the many aspects of Taiwan's overall aid plan.

"Debt relief is one option and we are still considering the idea," he said.

Out of respect for the Haitian government, the ministry declined to provide the amount of debt.

On Sunday, French economy minister Christine LaGarde urged Haiti's major creditors from the so-called "Paris Club," more specifically Taiwan and Venezuela — the country's biggest debt holders — to forgive Haiti's outstanding debt as a way to assist the relief effort.

France led the way by canceling US\$5.8 million in debt owed to it by Haiti.

So far, Taiwan has pledged US\$5 million in cash aid as well as other supplies.

The National Fire Agency confirmed that one of Taiwan's search and rescue teams had found two survivors.

A second relief team, made up of doctors from the Department of Health, the Red Cross Society and other NGOs, had also reached Haiti, the ministry said.

The first shipment of supplies from Taiwan, which includes water, medicines, medical

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supplies and food, is scheduled arrive in the Dominican Republic tomorrow night via FedEx and will be transported to Haiti by land immediately after the goods arrive, the ministry said.

News reports said Taiwan had rejected China's invitation to join efforts in the search and rescue work in Haiti.

Despite a lack of diplomatic relations with Haiti, China has been an avid participant in the relief work there.

A CNA report from Beijing quoted Wei Wei (魏伟), the director general of China's Department of Consular Affairs, as saying yesterday that China was ready to provide consular help to Taiwanese in Haiti.

Chen said the ROC embassy in Haiti was fully capable of meeting the needs of all Taiwanese compatriots.

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