

### Episode 3 – “International Search and Rescue Leadership in Response to the 2010 Haiti Earthquake”

#### **Background on Episode 3**

At the intersection of disaster management and leadership studies, the Leadership During Crisis Podcast series explores stories from leaders who have led through a complex crisis. Episode 3 focuses on challenges faced by the international search and rescue community in responding to the 2010 earthquake in Haiti. Through an interview with Dewey Perks, coordinator of the U.S. Agency for International Development's urban search and rescue program, the podcast team explores the evolution of the international search and rescue community, its operations in an environment as complex as Haiti post-earthquake, and leadership lessons from that disaster and others.

#### **Facilitator Context**

##### ***Global Humanitarian Structures & International Search and Rescue***

The U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) is the primary coordinating body of the United Nations for humanitarian assistance in response to international disasters and emergencies. OCHA coordinates field missions, manages a central emergency revolving fund, deploys U.N. disaster assessment and coordination teams (UNDAC), and coordinates with U.N. member organizations, NGOs, and foreign governments.<sup>i</sup> OCHA facilitates the global humanitarian response when a national government is overwhelmed and requests assistance.

OCHA also manages the Secretariat for the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG), which “facilitates coordination between the various international urban search and rescue (USAR) teams who make themselves available for deployment to countries experiencing devastating events of structural collapse due primarily to earthquakes.”<sup>ii</sup> Over its history, the INSARAG has established and maintained guidance to improve diverse teams’ ability to work together in the field in support of affected national governments and local communities. This includes a network of teams from across dozens of countries with varying levels of capability.

##### ***United States Search and Rescue Support in International Disasters***

The United States is a country member of INSARAG, represented by the U.S. Agency for International Development’s Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA). OFDA funds, provides guidance to, and maintains relationships with two heavy urban search and rescue teams based in Los Angeles and Fairfax County, Virginia. At OFDA’s request and under its coordination, these teams deploy to international disasters and perform at the most advanced level of functional capability for technical search and rescue in structural collapse incidents. Search and rescue resources are only one form of disaster assistance the U.S. Government may provide, through OFDA, to a foreign nation.<sup>iii</sup> In the case of Haiti, the U.S. Government deployed

*The Leadership During Crisis Podcast is an educational project of the Center for Disaster Management and the Frances Hesselbein Leadership Forum at the University of Pittsburgh’s Graduate School of Public and International Affairs (GSPIA).*

four additional search and rescue teams from the domestic system managed by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). This deployment of domestic search and rescue teams to an international disaster was the first of its kind, and has not since occurred.

### ***The Complexity of Global Humanitarian Response: Balancing Principles & Relationships***

Organizations and individuals involved in global humanitarian response must balance the principles of sovereignty and humanitarian imperatives. Meaning, humanitarian actors are invited or requested by a sovereign government and yet also believe those affected by disaster have a right to life with dignity and, therefore, a right to assistance. In order to respect sovereignty and meet needs for assistance, many humanitarian organizations and actors subscribe to a set of humanitarian principles, such as basing actions only on need (impartiality) and maintaining neutrality and independence from other political, economic, or military goals.<sup>iv</sup>

Humanitarian organizations and actors must also effectively coordinate with one another *in support of* the affected national government and local communities. This can be particularly difficult when national and local government officials and resources are impacted by the disaster, when relationships between these officials and local communities are strained, when responding organizations have competing interests, or when the sheer number of humanitarian actors overwhelms existing coordination mechanisms, such as was the case in Haiti.

### ***The 2010 Haiti Earthquake***

On January 12, 2010, a 7.0 magnitude earthquake struck 16 miles west of Haiti's capital, Port-au-Prince, causing massive destruction and loss of life and rendering thousands trapped or homeless. Immediately, President René Preval called for international humanitarian assistance to cope with the catastrophic impacts, prioritizing search and rescue needs. International assistance was especially critical given damage suffered by the Haitian government and the U.N. mission in the country, which both incurred heavy losses of personnel, facilities, and other assets.<sup>v</sup> Despite these losses, the Haitian government continued to direct priorities for response and recovery and its personnel worked alongside international actors to address needs related to search and rescue, shelter, transportation, security, and long-term damage assessments.<sup>vi</sup>

### ***The International & U.S. Response***

Following the earthquake, the U.N. deployed a team from OCHA that led coordination mechanism for humanitarian assistance from donor nations, non-governmental partners, and military assets.<sup>vii</sup> This coordination included search and rescue operations, as well as assistance organized by "clusters" such as food and agriculture, early recovery, and water, sanitation, and health. The U.N. also issued appeals for financial assistance for both immediate response and longer-term recovery needs. Immediately following President Preval's request for assistance, the U.S. deployed a 32-member Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART), through OFDA, to provide relief supplies, coordinate U.S. search and rescue teams, and support the clusters established through the U.N. system. USAID also coordinated interagency partners from across

*The Leadership During Crisis Podcast is an educational project of the Center for Disaster Management and the Frances Hesselbein Leadership Forum at the University of Pittsburgh's Graduate School of Public and International Affairs (GSPIA).*

the U.S. federal government—through what is known as a Response Management Team (RMT)—in Washington, D.C., with significant support provided by the Department of Defense.

### Discussion Questions

1. What factors contributed to the complex situation the international humanitarian community faced in responding to the 2010 earthquake in Haiti?
2. Dewey describes the significant role that preparedness and training play in ensuring search and rescue teams from the United States and elsewhere are ready to operate in such austere and complex conditions. How do these teams prepare themselves for such disasters in advance?
3. Ivoree and Dewey discuss the important role that trust plays both within individual search and rescue teams and across the broader community responding to a disaster. Why does trust matter so much in facilitating an effective response? Have you seen examples, following a disaster or crisis, where trust was lacking or absent? What happened as a result?
4. While Dewey conveys the significant preparations the U.S. and other teams undertake before a disaster, he also states, “While you can anticipate what you’re going to see [in terms of] after effects of an earthquake that strong, you can’t really appreciate it until you get on the ground.” In what ways did the search and rescue teams have to adapt once on the ground in Haiti?
5. Despite the damage the Haitian government incurred, national and local leaders continued to request and direct assistance in support of community needs. In this disaster and others, why does it matter that international teams continue to work in support of community leaders?
6. Emergency and disaster management is an inherently multidisciplinary field; meaning, it relies on the expertise of diverse professional disciplines. Why do you believe this is the case? How do you observe a multidisciplinary approach occurring within the search and rescue teams Dewey and Ivoree discuss?
7. Despite robust preparedness, search and rescue teams still experienced coordination and communications challenges following the earthquake in Haiti. What was the nature of these challenges? Following Haiti, how did the search and rescue community attempt to overcome these issues?
8. Dewey and Ivoree conclude the episode with a discussion of leadership lessons from this and other crises. Many of Dewey’s observations rest in a leader’s understanding of his own

*The Leadership During Crisis Podcast is an educational project of the Center for Disaster Management and the Frances Hesselbein Leadership Forum at the University of Pittsburgh’s Graduate School of Public and International Affairs (GSPIA).*

limits and knowledge. Why is this understanding so critical, particularly in crisis? What other leadership lessons do you observe from this episode?

## Resources

---

<sup>i</sup> Skyves, Richard. Chapter 8: Globalization of Disasters. *Disaster Policy and Politics*. 2015.

<sup>ii</sup> International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG):

<https://www.insarag.org/about/background>.

<sup>iii</sup> "USAID Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance Fact Sheet 2018." USAID. 2018.

[https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/OFDA\\_Fact\\_Sheet\\_0.pdf](https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/OFDA_Fact_Sheet_0.pdf).

<sup>iv</sup> "The Sphere Project: Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response." <http://www.spherehandbook.org/en/the-humanitarian-charter/>.

<sup>v</sup> Margesson, Rhoda and Maureen Taft-Morales. "Haiti Earthquake: Crisis and Response." Congressional Research Service. February 2010.

<sup>vi</sup> Ibid.

<sup>vii</sup> Ibid.