

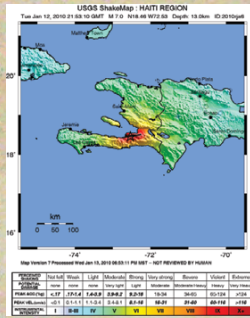
Problems of DVI Missions in Failed States

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Introduction/Abstract



Source: USGS, U.S. Geological Survey.

On January 12th 2010, a Richter magnitude 7.0 earthquake struck Haiti. An estimate of 200,000 people had been reported dead, about 300,000 injured, 1,000,000 homeless, over 280,000 buildings collapsed or severely damaged.

Since 2006, the minimum requirement of an orderly temporary burial for disaster victims is guided by the WHO, PAHO, IFRC and ICRC as the procedure of choice in cases when a disaster victim identification (DVI) process cannot start immediately. It was not reported that any of the international community's authorities took responsibility for an orderly temporary burial of the deceased for the purpose of this guidelines.

As long ago as 1980, the Interpol resolution adopted in the course of the 49th General Assembly session in Manila recognised the identification of an individual's human remains as a basic human right. After the 2010 Haiti earthquake, an extensive DVI mission has never been established.

Objectives

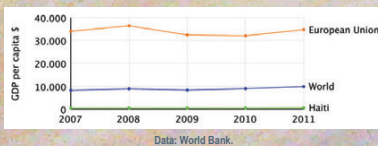
- Giving a descriptive recapitulation of the Haiti 2010 earthquake and aftermath.
- Giving a brief overview of existing guidelines and disaster responding protagonists.
- Discussing terms of DVI missions and their prospects for success.
- Showing gaps in large scale disaster response and proposing suggestions for improvements.

Materials & Methods

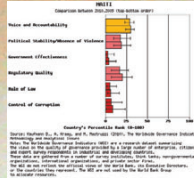
This is a descriptive report and an initiation for discussion. All materials used herein are from publicly accessible unsecretive resources. They are listed in the reference section.

Results

Haiti, both UN and Interpol member state, is a poor country in terms of GDP (Gross Domestic Product) per capita and has weak governance indicators.



Data: World Bank.



Source: World Bank

According to The Fund for Peace, Haiti can be described as a failed state. In 2009, Haiti was listed on the failed state index on rank number 12.

After the Haiti 2010 earthquake international media video reports showed human remains dug into mass graves, mingled with the debris of the collapsed buildings. An orderly temporary burial of the deceased would have required resources far in excess of what was available in Haiti at that time.

200 international guests had been reported missing in the collapsed Hotel Montana, Port-au-Prince. The UN reported the loss of 101 staff members in the earthquake, the worst loss of life the UN had ever suffered in a single incident. Under the lost UN staff members had been the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of Mission and the Deputy Special Representative to Haiti. The UN headquarters building, Hotel Christopher, Port-au-Prince, a 5 story hotel, had collapsed. So, the Haitian legal and regulatory framework was finally weak and enforcement capacity limited. A Haitian government, able to conduct and survey a DVI mission, unfortunately hardly existed anymore. It was not reported if Haiti ever issued the Interpol Major Disaster Assessment Form to ask for assistance and relief.

The overall responsibility for stabilising Haiti's governmental and administrative structures had legally been in the hands of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti MINUSTAH (UN Security Council resolution 1542). But MINUSTAH tragically lost many lives as well, there under a substantial number of their charring personnel. These facts hindered the mission capacity crucially. Additionally, even with best intentions, foreign troops came into the country and took control over strategic important infrastructure like e.g. Port-au-Prince International Airport. This scenario was unprecedented at that time. It seemed to be not quite clear who was in charge of the disaster relief process and how it should be actuated and organised. A coordinated extensive DVI process had not been established. But there had not been any article stating a limit of human losses leading to the perception that a DVI process had to be considered unhelpful.

The MINUSTAH was yet obliged to prevent that human remains of their deceased personnel would had been dug into mass graves or even dumped. Hotel companies operating in Haiti since decades could not accept to abandon missing persons supposed to be deceased in their destroyed hotel buildings. As a consequence and in concordance with the recommendations of the Interpol Tsunami Evaluation Working Group, reversed or targeted searches had been conducted within microzones, thus to prevent deceased victims from being dumped in this time-critical scenario.

Conclusions

Contrary to widespread myths, human remains, if properly temporarily buried, do not pose a significant health risk to the survivors of a disaster. The international community should never and under no circumstances accept human remains treated like waste, as such unreasonable measures are deeply disturbing and interfering with socio-cultural behaviors, beliefs and faith of all survivors. Management of dead bodies in respect and dignity is considered as an important part of psychosocial intervention. In huge disaster scenarios, in absence of sufficiently working governmental structures, it is legal, legitimate and highly ethical to perform a quick, massive and fast response by a professional disaster management company. This policy could also be conducted on a large scale. For the time-critical phase of first DVI response in a most complex scenario it is not useful to wait until an undefined number of national DVI teams are coordinated subject to national sensitivities.

Another future focus should be on DVI missions in combat scenarios, frequently correlated to failed states. The combatants are most likely not to accept foreign DVI teams. UN mandated neutral companies would be likely to perform the best initial DVI response in these cases. Those companies and its experts should be charged with the perpetuation of evidence in pursuance of the publicly appointed and sworn expert.

The Interpol DVI guide does not contain guidelines neither to manage a situation on the scale of the Haiti earthquake nor to manage a DVI response in combat areas. A periodically international round table conference on this topic under UN umbrella, comprising all protagonists, governmental, NGO and private companies should be established. An internationally accepted accreditation process for any DVI expertise specialities should be imple-

mented. Commercial investments to build up a worldwide sufficient DVI preparedness and large scale DVI response capability should be encouraged, giving consideration to the UN Office for Partnerships.

UN leadership in DVI missions in failed states and in combat areas would be desirable and leads to the following advantages:

- Clear command structure
- Clear responsibilities
- Dedicated communication network
- Formal accreditation of DVI teams
- Adequate funding

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Keywords

Disaster, Disaster Victim Identification, DVI, Earthquake, Failed States, Haiti, Interpol, Mass Graves, MINUSTAH, Temporary Burial, United Nations.