

Statement by

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Chairman Davis, Ranking Member Waxman, distinguished members of the Committee: thank you for the opportunity to address you today on international disaster relief assistance received by the United States as a result of Hurricane Katrina. It is a pleasure to be joined by representatives of the Departments of State (DoS) and Education, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

Introduction

Hurricane Katrina was one of the most challenging natural disasters in U.S. history – in terms of persons displaced, businesses disrupted, commerce affected, and in projected aggregate economic losses. In terms of its magnitude, Hurricane Katrina constituted one of the most destructive natural disasters in U.S. history, and proved to be the deadliest storm to strike since 1928.

International assistance received by the United States in the wake of Hurricane Katrina was tremendous. 151 nations, international organizations, and political entities offered assistance. Many of these same nations had accepted donations from the United States in previous disasters in their own countries. This generosity displayed by our friends and neighbors continued until well after Hurricane Katrina had passed.

Responsibilities under the International Coordination Support Annex

Under the International Coordination Support Annex of the National Response Plan (NRP), DoS is the primary coordinating U.S. Government agency responsible for “international coordination in support of the Federal Government’s response to a domestic Incident of National Significance.” In accordance with the Annex, the role of the Department of State is “to fully support Federal, State,

local, and tribal authorities in effective incident management and preparedness planning.”

With specific regard to international assistance, the Annex provides that DoS “acts as the intermediary for foreign offers of assistance to the U.S. Government” and works with other agencies to expedite delivery of such assistance. The Annex, however, does not provide the detailed means by which to handle assistance supplies once they arrive in the United States. The “Federal Response to Hurricane Katrina: Lessons Learned,” report released on February 23, 2006 as a result of the White House Hurricane Katrina Comprehensive Review, noted this deficiency and has called for the roles and responsibilities under the International Coordination Support Annex to be clarified further.

Hurricane Katrina Response Operations

When it became clear that the United States was going to accept international assistance in response to Hurricane Katrina, the U.S. Agency for International Development (UASID), Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), through the Joint Interagency Coordinating Group (JIACG), contacted U.S. Northern Command in order to establish an appropriate location for the delivery of international donations. Little Rock Air Force Base, Arkansas, was identified as the central collection point for foreign relief donations.

Little Rock Air Force Base was selected because of its proximity to the Hurricane Katrina-affected areas, and because the supplies that were arriving could then be loaded on trucks and moved out immediately. Although it was not a major hurricane relief staging area, and was not responsible for the warehousing of relief supplies, Little Rock Air Force Base served as a vital transportation hub in the response. The receipt of international donations was a mission led by OFDA;

however, the men and women of Little Rock Air Force Base provided needed assistance to OFDA-contracted support on base.

Examples of International Assistance

Although listing all 151 of the international donations to the United States for response and recovery to Hurricane Katrina would be impractical, noting these few examples will demonstrate the extraordinary worldwide response to this catastrophic disaster:

Mexico – The Mexican Armed Forces was a proud and vital contributor to the Hurricane Katrina response. To assist in rescue operations, the Mexican Navy sent the *MS Papaloapan*, carrying two helicopters, eight all-terrain vehicles, seven amphibious vehicles, two tankers, radio communications equipment, medical personnel, and 250 tons of food. Additionally, Mexican Army personnel were deployed to San Antonio, Texas, where they set up field kitchens and provided meals for the victims of Hurricane Katrina as they departed the devastated areas in and around New Orleans.

Canada – The Canadian government organized “Operation UNISON,” which involved more than 1,000 personnel from the Canadian Forces and Canadian Coast Guard. This task force comprised three warships – HMCS *Athabaskan*, HMCS *Toronto*, and HMCS *Ville de Quebec* – along with the Canadian Coast Guard vessel CCGS *Sir William Alexander* and four helicopters. Moreover, Canada provided a team of 35 military divers to assist the U.S. Navy’s efforts in clearing navigational hazards, including unsecured and sunken vessels and debris, and to inspect flood-damaged levees.

Singapore – The Republic of Singapore Air Force assigned four CH-47 Chinook helicopters to Louisiana to assist in relief operations. These four aircraft,

based in Grand Prairie, Texas, arrived in Ft. Polk, Louisiana to aid rescue operations, mainly in resupplying and airlifting missions. Forty-one personnel, including pilots, aircrew, and technicians, were deployed as part of this mission, and worked with the Texas Army National Guard in the relief efforts.

Lessons Learned

As with all Department of Defense operations, we have made it a priority to capture lessons learned from our response to Hurricane Katrina. We have been doing so ever since the hurricane made landfall. DoD has also fully supported the White House Comprehensive Review of the Federal Response to Hurricane Katrina. The findings of the resulting report indicate that coordination of the receipt of international assistance for Hurricane Katrina, in the beginning of the operation, was difficult.

As a result of the deficiencies identified by the Comprehensive Review, the following are some of the recommendations for improving the receipt and distribution of international assistance during a disaster:

- The Department of State (DOS) should lead the revision of the International Coordination Support Annex to the NRP, clarifying responsibilities of DOS, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), DoD, and other supporting agencies in response to domestic incidents.
- DHS and DOS should revise the NRP to include DoD and USDA Food Safety Inspection Service as cooperating agencies to the International Coordination Support Annex.

The recommendations note that including DoD more directly in foreign assistance management would leverage existing relationships with partner military establishments and help to ensure that staging areas for the acceptance of foreign aid are pre-planned and quickly available.

We continue to work with our interagency partners to implement the recommendations of the Comprehensive Review. As we move towards the 2006 hurricane season, in coordination with Federal interagency partners, we are already making steady progress in implementing 11 critical actions.

Conclusion

Mr. Chairman, I commend you and the members of this Committee for your leadership, interest in, and support of, the Department's homeland defense and civil support missions, with a particular focus today on international disaster relief assistance received by the United States as a result of Hurricane Katrina. I look forward to any questions you may have.