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Stepping up to help in Haiti

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Rainbow World Fund gives LGBT people an outlet to send aid to the impoverished island nation devastated by an earthquake

Tuesday's 7.0 earthquake near Haiti's capital devastated the already impoverished country. News and information from Haiti has been difficult to obtain because their previously fragile infrastructure was not designed to handle a disaster of this magnitude.



TRYING TO HELP | A man approaches a body lying in the rubble along Delmas road the day after an earthquake struck Port-au-Prince, Haiti. (Jorge Cruz/Associated Press)

Power, phones, water, roads and buildings in Port-au-Prince are nearly all gone. Their government buildings, including their Presidential Palace and Parliament, were leveled, taking with them much of the government. The president and the prime minister are still alive.

The death toll is difficult to pin down at this early stage, but reports coming out of Haiti suggest anywhere from 10,000 to several hundred thousand. Judging by anecdotal accounts of bodies piled up along roadsides, and continued deaths as aftershocks ravage one of the world's poorest countries, we do not need an official body count to know this humanitarian disaster is profound.

Upon hearing the news, I immediately reached out to my friends in the LGBT community to see how we could help. I was pleased to learn about the Rainbow World Fund, which has been supporting projects in Haiti since 2004.

Serendipitously, the Rainbow World Fund sent \$35,000 to Haiti the day before the earthquake.

Rainbow World Fund is working with CARE, which already had people on the ground in the country to provide basic necessities like food, shelter, and water.

The Rainbow World Fund is an all-volunteer organization, so 100 percent of the money donated for Haiti's relief will go directly to help the people.

RWF's work throughout the world touches millions. During the aftermath of Katrina, RWF donated 1 million meals.

They are working in Cambodia to eradicate land mines, in South Africa to fund monthly salaries for rural HIV peer educators and in Central America to provide safe drinking water, just to name a few of the organization's projects.

The LGBT community is rallying together to draw additional attention to Rainbow World Fund's efforts in Haiti. Several of our typically political bloggers have agreed to post HTML code with a link to RWF's Web site as they usually do for political campaigns.

Equal Rights Washington plans to send out an e-mail to its list to request contributions. Join the Impact is using its very active Twitter stream to inspire their base of supporters. The Human Rights Campaign posted a link to the RWF on the HRC Back Story, sent out a call to action to its e-mail list, and mobilized its social networking streams.

The grassroots is clearly engaged.

Join the Impact's Tweet was retweeted several hundred times in just a few minutes. A post to Washington's Approve Referendum 71 Facebook page inspired a healthy discussion of how people were planning to help. Facebook events from around the country sprung up yesterday announcing fundraisers at LGBT community centers.

The LGBT community will no doubt help in unquantifiable ways. Tragedies like this can't help but remind us of our mutual humanity.

Regardless of borders, nationalities, sexual orientations or political ideology, it is our duty as relatively comfortable Americans to help our human brothers and sisters in times of tragedy.

I'm pleased to be part of a community so ready and quick to respond in times of need.

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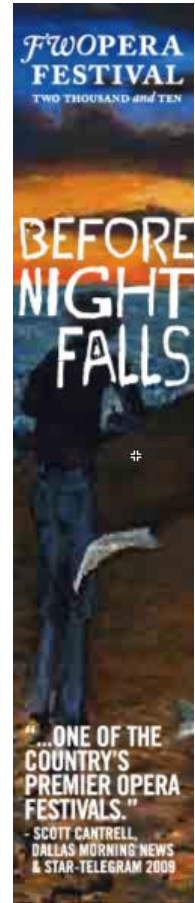
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