

Global YMCA movement: responding to community needs at home and abroad

For more than 160 years, YMCAs around the world have addressed the most pressing social challenges and provided innovative responses to serve their communities. As an interconnected global movement with locations in more than 120 countries, the YMCA is well positioned to launch critical strategies and services to meet the needs of society – especially in times of crises.

This year, after devastating earthquakes hit Haiti and Chile, the global YMCA movement quickly responded with resources to help the YMCAs in the impacted areas serve the many displaced survivors in their communities. In 2005, the YMCAs from around the world offered support to the YMCA of New Orleans and surrounding communities after Hurricane Katrina. In 2004, the global movement immediately mobilized technical and financial resources for YMCAs in Sri Lanka, India and Indonesia, in response to the unprecedented destruction of the tsunami that devastated many Asian countries.

In each case, the global Y network came together to support the affected national movements to ensure their ability to respond to and serve their respective communities. In a similar manner, on a day-to-day basis the global movement works together to ensure that each national YMCA is a strong, self-sufficient organization with effective operations, relevant programs and strategies for long-term sustainability. As one of the largest social service organizations in the world, the YMCA has the scale and scope to positively impact the human condition globally.

Below you will find updates on the YMCAs of Chile and Haiti:

Chile YMCA:

In the early morning hours of February 27, Chile suffered a massive 8.8 magnitude earthquake. The quake was the strongest the region has experienced in decades.

Mr. Oscar Ordenes, the National General Secretary of the Chile YMCA (based in Valparaiso), reported that all staff and volunteers of the affected YMCAs survived the quake and are safe. YMCAs in the impacted areas suffered minor damage to their facilities.



Youth participants of the Chile YMCA (prior to earthquake).

- **YMCA Concepcion** is located directly in the area of the earthquake's epicenter but the newly constructed facility withstood the impact with minimal damage to its main building.
- **YMCA Temuco** is located a few miles from the epicenter and sustained minor damage. Staff/volunteers were able to remove debris and reopen to members within days of the earthquake.
- **YMCA Valparaiso** is located 200 miles from the epicenter and incurred more extensive damage (gym floor, fallen ceiling tiles and possible structural damage). In addition, the YMCA George Williams School, Rukantu (the YMCA residence for children) and other social outreach facilities managed by the Valparaiso YMCA, sustained minor damage and all of the children are safe. Staff/volunteers are focused on removing debris and resuming normal operations at the YMCA main building as soon as possible.
- **YMCA Santiago** reported minor infrastructure damage to the central building and the San Bernardo YMCA branch is closed because of ceiling damage and a fallen wall.

Chilean YMCA leadership at both the national and local levels are conducting a needs assessment of the affected YMCAs and surrounding communities and will develop a response plan that will be implemented with support from the global YMCA family. Several YMCAs in the United States have relationships with YMCAs in Chile and are actively showing support and solidarity to our Chilean colleagues and friends.

Haiti YMCA:

Gwenael Apollon, General Secretary of the Haiti YMCA, reports that more than seven weeks after the January earthquake, life in Port-au-Prince continues to be very difficult with slow progress towards re-establishing basic services and the rebuilding of the city's infrastructure. Many people continue to leave Port-au-Prince, Leogane, Grand Goave and Petit Goave for more secure locations; however, most people are helping others to rebuild their lives. Gwenael further stated:

Generally speaking, foreign organizations, the United Nations and the 5,000 NGOs on the ground in Haiti are busy with clean-up and rebuilding. Ambulances and fire trucks are everywhere, while heavy trucks and equipment work on the demolition of cracked houses and buildings. Many people sweep and remove debris from the streets as part of a "food for work program."

As we move into March, a more complex period of transition between the emergency phase and the reconstruction phase has begun. Although the persistent fragility of the people in the communities and the debut of the hurricane season are pulling us back, we should, while paying attention to help our communities, not overlook the task on hand which is empowering YMCA Haiti to increase its capacity and ability to serve youth and families for the mid-and long-term.



We are meeting with our Y global partners, including YMCA of the USA, YMCA of Dominican Republic and Latin and Caribbean Alliance of YMCA team members from March 2-9, 2010. The objectives will be to take next steps to rebuild YMCA Haiti as an organization to increase and expand its reach in terms of providing relief support and strengthen its role and presence in Haiti as a partner organization for the development of youth and families.

YMCA of the USA would like to thank the local YMCAs and individuals across the U.S. for their valuable technical and financial support. ***If you would like to help, please make a donation to YMCA World Service at www.ymca.net/worldservice or by calling (800) 872-9622. If you wish to designate your support, please be sure to specify that your contribution is for "Haiti Earthquake Support" or "Chile Earthquake Support"*** At this time, Y-USA will not coordinate the collection/distribution of supplies due to the extreme logistical challenges - including transport, distribution and storage - on the ground in Haiti and Chile. We will continue to post information as it becomes available. **You can find all updates at www.ymca.net/worldservice.** Please feel free to contact me with any questions or comments.

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