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Dear Bishops:

In the past month, brutal storms, typhoons, an earthquake and a tsunami have devastated communities in countries spanning from Burkina Faso to the Samoan Islands. For people already living on the edge, the effect of these natural disasters has been catastrophic, including the loss of homes, livelihoods and loved ones. Catholic Relief Services has reached out in response to these needs; following is a brief update on our efforts, and highlights of our communications with your dioceses.

### **Flooding in Burkina Faso**

On September 1<sup>st</sup>, more than 100,000 people were driven from their homes in Burkina Faso's capital, Ouagadougou, when a stalled storm dumped more than 10 inches of rain in a 12-hour period. Tens of thousands of people remain homeless from this crisis, the worst flooding this small West African nation has experienced in 80 years. CRS has been working closely with the local Caritas; our collaborative efforts include transporting and delivering nearly 100 metric tons of food (bulgur, lentils and oil) to those affected, providing the supplies needed to rebuild their lives, rehabilitating schools, constructing toilets and washing areas at temporary shelter sites, and supplying large storage tanks to ensure displaced families have access to clean water.

### **Typhoons Ketsana and Parma**

**Philippines:** Typhoon Ketsana tore through the Philippines on Sept. 26, leaving the capital city of Manila under water and drenching the island of Luzon with more than 13 inches in less than 8 hours. The heavy rains destroyed houses and infrastructure, claimed the lives of some 300 people and left thousands homeless. Twenty-three provinces declared a "state of calamity." With Caritas Philippines, CRS immediately began providing thousands of families with food (rice, canned goods, noodles and vegetable oil), and emergency supplies, such as blankets, mosquito nets and soap. As lowlands were hit hardest by the storm, CRS is focusing its initial responses on coastal areas.

Just one week later, Typhoon Parma, slammed into the northern Philippines. Parma triggered floods and landslides and forced more families from their homes. Though this second storm was not as brutal as Ketsana, it affected ongoing recovery efforts.

**Vietnam:** Days after hitting the Philippines, Typhoon Ketsana struck Vietnam, where it triggered mudslides, washed out roads and fields, and severely damaged more than 150,000 homes in Quang Nam province alone. Flooding was so sudden and heavy that CRS' initial response was to distribute life

jackets. Damaged infrastructure has impeded emergency response efforts, but CRS sent assessment teams to evaluate the greatest needs, and plans a two-stage response to cover both immediate emergency needs and longer term recovery requirements. Our response will build, in part, off existing projects, including the H1N1 preparedness courses we were providing in some schools.

### **Earthquake in Indonesia**

The island of West Sumatra was hit by substantial earthquakes – one with a 7.6-magnitude on Sept. 30, and another with a 7.0 magnitude two days later – and torrential rains that induced mudslides. Official figures put the death toll in the hundreds, but several hundred more people may be buried under mud or collapsed buildings. Thousands of people were displaced from their homes, taking refuge in undamaged mosques or public buildings, or staying in the open for fear of aftershocks. CRS is working in collaboration with the Diocese of Padang, one of the hardest hit areas, and the Indonesian Caritas (KARINA) to distribute tarps, procure badly needed supplies – including 5,000 sarongs, hygiene kits and blankets – and identify and target further needs. We are committed to working with these partners and others in both immediate response and longer term recovery and reconstruction efforts

### **Earthquake and tsunami in Pacific Islands**

On Sept. 29, an 8.3 magnitude earthquake triggered a tsunami that hit Samoa, American Samoa and Tonga. Fifteen-foot-high waves washed away homes and businesses, and killed more than 150 people. We are responding through the Caritas network, having committed funding for the first stage of the response to Caritas Samoa, which is working with the local Church, to provide shelter, food, water and clothing to dozens of families. Catholic Charities is responding in American Samoa.

### **Other Crises**

The urgent natural disasters highlighted above have received significant media and donor attention in recent weeks, but don't provide an exhaustive list of the emergencies to which CRS is responding.

- In **Afghanistan**, we are continuing to respond to critical needs, including support in agriculture, water, education and women's livelihoods, while closely monitoring rising security threats.
- In **India**, flooding in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka states has affected more than 600,000 families, severely damaging nearly 200,000 homes and causing more than \$4 million of losses. With partners, we are conducting rapid assessments in affected areas.
- In **Niger**, the government has declared an emergency situation after severe flooding in the Agadez and Tilleberry regions in early September wiped out homes and fields. In a nation already struggling with food insecurity, deficits in agricultural production can be life-threatening. CRS assessment teams are evaluating the priority needs.
- Prolonged droughts in **East Africa** are causing massive crop failures, killing livestock and creating a food crisis that may affect 20 million people. CRS programs continue to serve affected communities in Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda, addressing their critical needs.
- In **Guatemala**, thousands of families are facing hunger in the East Central Pacific departments, which have experienced irregular rainfall and drought since May. In this region known as the dry corridor, some areas have lost up to 80 percent of their yearly bean and maize crops. Working with the Diocese of Jalapa, CRS hopes to reach more than 8,000 families in some of the hardest hit communities.

## **Coordination in the United States**

**Communications:** Via its regional offices across the country, CRS has provided diocesan directors with an update on the emergency responses in Asia, along with other resources, such as a prayer to use in petitions, information for Church bulletins and “How to Help” information. With support from two Regional Information Officers on the ground, the agency has been featured in a broad range of news stories in Catholic and secular media. Each of these efforts is aimed at engaging Catholics across the U.S.

**Fundraising:** CRS is fundraising for these efforts through urgent email and direct-mail appeals. In addition to a large gift from private donors, we have raised more than \$225,000 online to date, including \$110,000 from an email blast to donors. A second email is planned, as is a direct mailing to more than 500,000 annual donors. We are grateful for the outpouring of support to date and anticipate more.

As noted in sections above, CRS plans a two-stage approach in most of the affected countries – immediate relief for those suffering from the natural disasters, and extended recovery and rehabilitation efforts to help affected people get to their feet again. Given the severity of these crises, we anticipate some responses will take many months. We will continue to post updates on our Web site ([www.crs.org](http://www.crs.org)).

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Don Hart". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "D" and "H".