

REMARKS OF DEPUTY SECRETARY RON SIMS
NATIONAL COMMISSION ON CHILDREN AND DISASTER
LONG-TERM DISASTER RECOVERY WORKSHOP
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 1ST, 2010

Introduction/ Recognitions:

- Good Morning.
- I am thankful to be here – because children, quality of life, and community welfare are extremely important issues to me, and are among the key reasons why I’ve chosen to dedicate my life to public service.
- I would especially like to thank and recognize Mark Shriver, Chairperson of the Commission and Vice President and Managing Director for U.S. Programs at Save the Children.
 - Mark has been a strong advocate and leader on children’s issues, and I appreciate his inviting me to this event.
- I’d also like to thank:
 - Dr. Michael Anderson, Vice Chair of the Commission, and all the members of the Commission for their hard work in support of children.

- Tracy Wareing, Chair of the Children’s Working Group for the Federal Emergency Management Agency, and Counselor to the Secretary of Homeland Security, who has been instrumental to the Commission,
- And finally – I’d like to thank all of you for your commitment and compassion for improving children’s lives.

Children and Disasters:

- **INJECT PERSONAL STORY ABOUT CHILDREN/ YOUR CHILDREN AND GOVERNMENT’S ROLE IN HELPING CHILDREN LEAD PRODUCTIVE, HAPPY, AND HEALTHY LIVES**
- **DISCUSS YOUR TRIP TO NEW ORLEANS IN AUGUST – AND SECRETARY DONOVAN’S MULTIPLE TRIPS TO NEW ORLEANS SINCE ASSUMING HIS ROLE AS SECRETARY.**
- Indeed, supporting children throughout a disaster is one of the most important obligations we must meet as policymakers.
- We don’t need to look very far off our shores—or very deep into the newspapers today—to see the devastation in Haiti.

- It has been devastating to the entire country, especially its children. We need to only look at the rising number of orphans to see how central children's issues are in long term recovery.
- My sincere appreciation goes out to the U.S. Agency for International Development, the Department of Health and Human Services, and my own agency, HUD, for playing a critical role in helping our neighbors climb out of the rubble.
- A member of my staff said to me that Haiti is a “wake-up call” for the United States – because it will happen here.
- And the truth is, in some ways, it already has.
 - All of us have seen the devastation of catastrophic events here in the United States – from Hurricane Andrew to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.
 - We also have strong scientific evidence that the New Madrid and San Andreas faults may be triggered sooner rather than later.

- Yet while we are aware of potential risks, we still have not acted to put the pieces in place for a comprehensive response and recovery effort.
- We still have serious gaps in how our nation responds to disasters.

Long-Term Disaster Recovery Working Group

- That being said, President Obama knew that these gaps in our capabilities existed – and he saw this as an unprecedented opportunity to call the nation to action.
- As a result, the Long-term Disaster Recovery Working Group was formed by President Obama because of the need for the Federal government to take a more holistic approach to providing recovery support to communities devastated by disasters.
- A lot of great work has been done by our partners in the Department of Homeland Security and across the Federal government to improve our response capabilities and I want to thank them for the steps they have taken.

- But this effort is really designed to identify those areas where the federal government can better transition from a response to recovery role and help communities throughout the lifecycle of a rebuilding and recovery effort.
 - That is why the President asked Secretary Napolitano and HUD Secretary Shaun Donovan, to join forces and co-chair this effort.
- He also called upon all applicable Cabinet departments, including Health and Human Services, as well as other federal agencies involved in long-term disaster recovery, to be part of the effort.
- Its primary goal is to produce a report that we will deliver to the President.
 - The report will outline recommendations on how we, as a federal government, can better support communities in their preparation and recovery from disasters.
- We launched this effort by conducting robust outreach with national stakeholders.

- This process included ten virtual teleconferences, five stakeholder forums, as well as four non-profit and expert forums.
- We were honored to help host one of these convenings at HUD's Weaver Building in early January.
- These forums were structured around the following five focus areas:
 - **The National Disaster Recovery Framework:** similar to the National Response Framework, it will address current roles and missions across all levels of government and the private and nonprofit sectors, but from a recovery perspective.
 - **Federal Programs:** this area conducted an assessment of existing disaster related programs, authorities, and legislation.
 - It will make recommendations on potential changes in an effort to reduce redundancies, streamline funding, and deliver the necessary services faster – with greater accountability.

- **Enhancing State and Local Capacity:** identifying the plans and tools required to help communities better prepare for disasters.
 - This area will address surge staffing following a disaster, infrastructure improvements, and community development planning.
- **Non-profit, Philanthropic, and Private Sector Support:** certainly close to home for this group – this area focused on how the incredible potential of NGOs and non-public entities can be better harnessed and coordinated in the wake of a disaster to support the various demands of a community.
- **Resilience and Sustainability:** are at the core of this effort – as they touch virtually every facet of recovery.
 - As you all know, recovery begins in many ways before disaster strikes – in preparation and planning. And if a disaster does take place – the intent should not be to just rebuild what was there before, but, as

- This focus area of the working group has really targeted community planning and development. Climate adaptation, environmental impacts, economic development, and security are all inter-related disaster concerns and must be integrated into community plans – not “stove piped” or an afterthought.
- Though the process is far from over, what quickly emerged as a principle theme is really a fundamental paradigm shift:
 - A greater focus on pre-disaster actions to mitigate effects of disasters and planning for disaster recovery as much as possible ahead of time.
- There are several important elements of this paradigm shift, including:
 - We must understand our risk. This means a realistic assessment by a community of its risk related to a natural or manmade disaster.

- We must be inclusive. We must ensure that all people, regardless of race, financial means, religious beliefs, or zip code – have the means to withstand and rebuild their lives following a disaster.
- We must understand that it's more than just bricks and mortar. Planners must do more than re-build houses and infrastructure – they must understand the complexities of human needs and requisite social services – health care, day care, educational facilities, the needs of children and families.
- While we are still working on this report, let me mention some of the emerging concepts that are forming. From our outreach and work with our stakeholders we know:
 - There must be a single coordinating federal entity to work with the communities and integrate federal support.
 - We need to streamline funding support and simplify program vehicles.
 - We need to consolidate viable data for modeling, coastal erosion, land use impacts, and prevention programs.

- We must lower barriers to enable non-profit and volunteer organizations to better assist community projects and human recovery efforts.
- We've come to a general agreement that HUD must take on a larger role in recovery coordination and planning.

Impact Our Work Will Have on Children in Disasters:

- So how does this all this affect children in a disaster?
- When it comes to the impact disasters have on children, children often bear the brunt of the trauma and pain caused by a natural or man-made disaster.
- It impacts every facet of their lives. This can be seen in the complexity of providing effective case management that meets the needs of children.
 - After Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, Gustav and Ike, several disaster case management programs were implemented in Louisiana.

- Despite the outpouring and compassion within the communities, we were not able to meet basic needs. We can and must do better.
- As you well know, a round table hosted by the Children’s Health Fund last October underscored the importance of disaster case management and the need for improvement in our provision of services.
- We need to look at how these programs best work together and reduce redundancies to deliver the critical services. We are working with our stakeholders right now to identify gaps and how to best address case management.
- The initial failure to identify and register individuals and families that need case management programs, and then to maintain those programs, in broad, systemic ways, has left people vulnerable when they did not have to be.
- That’s why together, we must use the work of the Long-Term Disaster Recovery Working Group—and the report that we will be delivering to President Obama—as a starting point for

Conclusion:

- At HUD, we are an interagency leader when it comes to working together to better serve the needs of our nation's children and youth.
 - One of twelve federal agency partners on the Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs.
 - HUD is also an active federal partner on the Federal Mentoring Council, and it is a member of the Coordinating Council on Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.
 - Just last week had the opportunity to speak to HUD's efforts to tackle youth homelessness.
- As I look out on the audience today and I see the dedication and commitment you have to the children of this nation, I am extremely optimistic that we can create a more resilient nation: one in which individuals, communities, regions, and

- Thank you for your exceptional work – and thank you for inviting me to speak here this morning.