



*Office of Public Affairs  
U.S. Embassy, Wellington*

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## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **The United States response to the Christchurch earthquake**

Over the last 24 hours, the United States Mission New Zealand has been working very closely with the emergency responders in Christchurch. U.S. Ambassador David Huebner says, “We have been concentrating our full attention since 12:51pm on Tuesday on practical ways in which the U.S. could quickly help those affected by this tragedy.” The steps taken include:

- U.S.-based search and rescue teams were quickly put on standby, and equipment and personnel were positioned to facilitate deployment. When the Government of New Zealand signaled that such assistance would be useful, a USAID Disaster Assistance Response Team, which includes the Los Angeles County (California) Fire Department Urban Search and Rescue team, was dispatched. This “heavy team” is en route and will bring more than seventy specialized personnel and all necessary equipment to rescue those trapped, in even the most precarious situations.
- Deputy Administrator for Protection and National Preparedness (at FEMA) Tim Manning – already in Christchurch for bilateral meetings – deployed with his NZ Civil Defence colleagues with building-to-building searches and structural inspections. Manning, who has extensive experience as a First Responder, remains deployed and working in Christchurch.
- Approximately one dozen U.S. Embassy staff – also in Christchurch for meetings – joined their NZ VCO colleagues in successfully evacuating

approximately one hundred persons from AMI Stadium and facilitating their muster across town at the Antarctic center and the airport.

- Those Embassy staff remain in Christchurch assisting American citizens in distress and distributing GNZ advisories and information to displaced persons they encounter, regardless of nationality. They continue a 24/7 schedule of visiting each of the triage and welfare centers to establish contact with American citizens, determine their condition, and facilitate necessary assistance.
- U.S. Embassy Wellington's disaster coordinator Michael Layne remains deployed in Christchurch to assist in processing of American citizens, to assess and report needs back to Wellington and Washington, and to coordinate directly with NZ Civil Defence colleagues on the ground.
- U.S. Consular officials in Auckland and Wellington have fielded hundreds of calls from American citizens and are assisting them with replacing passports and other travel documents lost or destroyed in the quake. American Citizens service stations were set up at both the military and civilian airports in Wellington, as well as in Auckland.
- The U.S. Embassy has fielded hundreds of calls and emails from the U.S.A. and within New Zealand regarding potentially missing persons.
- Because of the heavy volume of work, which has kept our staffers literally working around the clock, we are flying in additional Consular staff from our sister U.S. Mission in Australia.
- The U.S. Embassy immediately set up a Christchurch earthquake assistance center at the Auckland Consulate General, which can be contacted on tel: 64 9 303 2724 (American Citizens Services Section, x 2800, x2900), or email: [chquake@state.gov](mailto:chquake@state.gov) .
- We worked to confirm the safety of our Kiwi student advisors at the University of Canterbury. We understand that the University of Canterbury has done a headcount of international students at their international halls of residence (which house 95% of international students) and that all U.S. students are currently accounted for.

- While triage and initial assistance is being offered in Christchurch and Wellington, American citizens needing replacement documentation are being channeled to Auckland if possible, as all documents will be processed at the Consulate General.
- We continue to urge American citizens seeking or providing information about the welfare or whereabouts of Americans in Christchurch to email: [chquake@state.gov](mailto:chquake@state.gov), or call the U.S. Consulate General in Auckland on 64 9 303 2724 (American Citizens Services Section, x 2800, x2900).

The Ambassador said, “I left a tranquil and beautiful Christchurch shortly before the earthquake struck, to accompany a delegation of our Congressmen to Wellington for meetings. I was shocked at the images broadcast of a devastated, but not beaten, Christchurch so shortly after we landed.”

At Parliament when alerted by Washington of a major seismic event, the Ambassador met with Foreign Minister Murray McCully within 90 minutes of the quake to convey President Obama’s concern and to offer the assistance of the U.S. Government. The Ambassador stated, “As our Marines said at a prior time of crisis, when you need a friend you have one. Just tell us what we can do.”

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has spoken to Foreign Minister McCully, confirming that the U.S. “stands ready to provide assistance to the government of New Zealand and to the brave people of Christchurch.” President Obama has issued a statement reiterating the offer of assistance.