

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MAY 11, 1976

Office of the White House Press Secretary

THE WHITE HOUSE

TO THE CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES:

On May 6, an earthquake of great destructiveness hit the northeastern portion of Italy. The Italian Government currently estimates that this disaster has left over 800 persons dead, more than 2,300 injured, and from 40,000 to 60,000 people homeless.

In the message I sent to President Leone immediately following the news of the earthquake, I expressed our sympathy for those who are suffering and indicated that the United States stands ready to provide assistance. Initial U.S. aid, under U.S. Ambassador John Volpe's direction, has been speedy and has included:

- Emergency shelters, medical supplies and foodstuffs provided through the Agency for International Development and the Department of Defense.
- Transportation and medical facilities, including medical evacuation helicopters from the Department of Defense.
- Reconstruction and heavy earth moving equipment from three of our bases in Italy.
- Disaster relief specialists to assist Italian Government authorities in planning and implementing relief programs.

While this initial assistance has been helpful, more aid is needed to help the survivors to rebuild their lives and to help the Italian nation recover from this tragedy. Accordingly, I have asked the Congress to provide \$25 million in disaster relief as part of the Second Supplemental Appropriations Bill for FY 1976.

At the same time, at my request, Vice President Rockefeller will visit Italy this week to receive a firsthand report on the impact of the earthquake and on the ways in which the United States can best be of assistance. He will be accompanied by my Special Coordinator for International Disaster Assistance -- AID Administrator Daniel Parker -- who has been instructed to review the situation in the fullest possible detail. Based on the firsthand assessment resulting from this mission, I will immediately inform the Congress should there be further steps required to permit the United States to assist as fully and effectively as possible.

In the US-Italian Joint Statement of 1974, President Leone and I took note of the extraordinarily broad human ties between Italy and the United States of America, and the shared values and goals which bind together the Italian

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and American peoples. Now, at a time when natural disaster has brought such great tragedy to the people of Italy, Americans everywhere are moved to respond quickly and in the spirit of profound friendship between our countries.

The request I have sent to the Congress for \$25 million in disaster relief assistance will enable us immediately to translate our concern into action to help alleviate the suffering in Italy.

GERALD R. FORD

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