

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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THE WHITE HOUSE

EXCHANGE OF REMARKS  
BETWEEN THE PRESIDENT  
AND  
THE VICE PRESIDENT  
AND  
DANIEL PARKER  
ADMINISTRATOR OF AID

THE OVAL OFFICE

2:20 P.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: I have asked the Vice President and Mr. Parker to come in and give me a first-hand report on the AID request I made to the Congress to help the earthquake victims in Italy and, as all of you know, the Vice President and Daniel Parker went to Italy to see first-hand the devastation that came from the earthquake, to talk to the people, to work with the Government and to show first-hand that this Administration is very, very concerned and willing to help in trying to alleviate the suffering and participate in the rebuilding.

So, Mr. Vice President, would you give us a quick summary of what you saw?

VICE PRESIDENT ROCKEFELLER: Let me just take us back a little, Mr. President. You have done a lot of wonderful things for people in your life, but of all the things you have done, I don't think anything has ever reached people the way this action of yours -- sending that message to Congress -- \$25 million -- to which Congress acted and responded -- the way that has touched the Italian people.

We were over there. We arrived, and people -- old ladies rushed out, turned up, everywhere we went people came up to us -- everywhere we went people came up and thanked you for what the American people were doing in standing with them, standing with Italians is the way they felt, in their suffering.

I was talking to a doctor in one of the tents and I might just say that half the population out of 180,000 people -- 90,000 people -- lost their homes and they are in tents, big tents, 20 people in one tent, beds just next to each other, like that, in two rows, and one chair and a basin.

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We were in there. It rained for two days and nights. We were talking to doctors in this village who were taking care of the people.

When I went out of the tent, they said, "He didn't say so, but he lost his daughter and his mother."

THE PRESIDENT: You were telling me of the one woman in the hospital who lost seven children.

VICE PRESIDENT ROCKEFELLER: Six children she had lost. I came in and we went to the hospital. There were 1,000 people killed and about 2,500 in the hospital, and 90,000 homes, but the hospital was taking the people in. Her husband was there and going down the ward and he just came over and threw his arms around me. She was absolutely unable to even react. She lost all her family. Her leg was crushed. It was extraordinary.

But the response to America, they just feel -- and, as I said, we are all in a family together -- your people helped build our country and now you are in trouble, we are with you, thanks to the President and the Congress.

But the extraordinary thing was, they weren't complaining about what happened. Their courage, their dignity, their strength is fantastic. All they want to do, the one thing on their minds is how can they get materials to start rebuilding their homes. They don't want to move out of there.

THE PRESIDENT: The \$25 million I recommended, and Congress has approved, will be under the guidance of Dan Parker of AID.

Dan, do you want to give us a quick rundown of what we are doing?

MR. PARKER: As the Vice President indicated, Mr. President, our objective is to get our assistance to the people as quickly as possible. There are many small villages in this area. In this area, about 60 villages were either totally or very substantially destroyed.

By October, they have to get out of the temporary housing and get back into some kind of shelter that can last them over the winter. It will probably take two or three years to rebuild totally.

So the objective of the Italian Government, and ours, in assisting them, is to get as quickly as possible some sort of decent shelter.

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The interests of the commercial, the industry, even the farming, the agricultural business, is very substantially disrupted. They lost substantial amounts of their dairy equipment, key parts of their economy.

The villages are old and have a lot of historic value. What was interesting to me was people would approach me and point out the need to protect their historic monuments, their church, their city hall.

I would find afterwards that the man who had been saying that to me had lost members of his family, his home had been destroyed, yet one of the first things on his mind was, protect our cultural heritage.

THE PRESIDENT: This is in the northern part, as I understand. The Yugoslavian border is here, Trieste, and the Austrian border is north.

MR. PARKER: North, yes. This is an alluvial plain and it rises into the mountains rather precipitously. The impact area is right where the rugged hills are and there are quite a number of avalanches that did quite a bit of damage. There are quite a number of incipient ones that have to be taken care of before the area is safe.

THE PRESIDENT: Is this an area where there have been earthquakes previously?

MR. PARKER: No, Mr. President. The best records we can find show the last earthquake in this area was in the 1500s. So it is not an occurrence they would be ready for. We hope, however, that in rebuilding that the new structures will, in fact, be resistant to it.

VICE PRESIDENT ROCKEFELLER: Mr. President, the Italian Government did a beautiful job in moving immediately on this, and the Italian military, within an hour -- between an hour and two hours -- were in all the -- all the deaths occurred in the first minute of the earthquake. This whole thing happened just like that.

THE PRESIDENT: What time of day was it?

VICE PRESIDENT ROCKEFELLER: 9:00 in the evening. That is why so many people were in their homes. That is why they were killed in their homes.

THE PRESIDENT: We had, before you and Dan Parker came, we had some of our military come --

VICE PRESIDENT ROCKEFELLER: They did a beautiful job reporting to me.

THE PRESIDENT: -- helicopters, light wing, fixed wing aircraft.

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MR. PARKER: There is an American air base, Mr. President, Aviano, which is very close to the area, and those men, we can be very proud of them, both as an organized military unit and, as well, individuals and their families, and it has been really terrific.

VICE PRESIDENT ROCKEFELLER: They had many volunteers, too.

THE PRESIDENT: I thank you very, very much, Mr. Vice President, and Dan Parker, for the emergency mission for the best interests of those unfortunates who suffered, but I think it is another expression of American humanitarianism in an emergency, whether it is in Guatemala or Italy. The United States has moved in the right way as quickly as possible and with very good results.

VICE PRESIDENT ROCKEFELLER: And the Italian people, Mr. President, feel the American people are with them. This shows tremendous sense of courage and help for the people at their moment of need.

Thanks to you.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you all very much.

END (AT 2:25 P.M. EDT)