

Testimony of
Major Todd Hawks
Public Affairs Secretary and Associate
National Community Relations & Development Secretary
The Salvation Army

Before the
Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

Of the
United States Senate

March 7, 2006

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Good morning. The Salvation Army appreciates this opportunity to discuss our disaster relief services and to share our thoughts on how governments and NGOs can collaborate more effectively to provide food, water, supplies, and other needed services to disaster survivors.

When this Committee convened a similar Roundtable Discussion shortly after Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast, my colleague Major Marilyn White participated in the conversation. As Major White indicated in her testimony, The Salvation Army's response to disasters entails:

- Providing food and water to both survivors and first-responders;
- Helping survivors clean up homes that weathered the storm;
- Providing shelter to those who lost their homes;
- Utilizing case management to assess the needs of families and harness the social services needed to help survivors put their lives back together again; and,
- Offering emotional and spiritual comfort to disaster victims and emergency workers coping with the stress of the disaster.

Now, six months later, I can update you on our activities in the Gulf Coast area and hopefully shed some light on how coordination can be improved in the future.

One might assume that the need for our initial response services in the Gulf Coast would be tapering off. To the contrary, we're expanding our services and shifting the nature of our activities from immediate relief to recovery. We've doubled the number of

caseworkers and opened another distribution center in New Gretna, Louisiana, to better serve the people of the New Orleans area.

For a better sense of how an average family might benefit from these services, I'll share with you some of the highlights of a recent report from our Southern Mississippi Recovery Command Center. We now have four Disaster Recovery Centers operating in the area, in Pascagoula, Biloxi, Gulfport, and Pass Christian. Distributed at these centers are essential supplies required for returning home: boxes of food, cleanup kits, and other household items. For those who are unable to return home and are living in FEMA trailers, we're providing dishes, silverware, and other household necessities. Our case managers in the Disaster Recovery Centers are also working with families to assess their needs, and it is through this process that we are beginning to distribute furniture and appliances.

We are also involved in long-term recovery efforts, although we often act in partnership with other organizations when we do so. Again using southern Mississippi as an example, The Salvation Army has partnered with Project Teamwork to house volunteer groups that are working to repair homes and remove debris so that families can return to their homes.

We do not have an exit plan for the Gulf Coast. Our best and brightest will be there, on the ground, in the region for at least two full years.

The American people have supported all of these activities through donations, entrusting The Salvation Army to use their gifts efficiently and effectively.

Each charitable organization uses contributions in a way that reflects their individual strengths. Different organizations have different strengths. Our use of contributions reflects these strengths in both the response and recovery phases.

To date, the Army has received \$336 million in donations. We've spent one-third of it – \$122 million – largely on initial response services. Of the \$122 million spent so far, 70% has gone towards direct financial assistance to survivors - including gift cards, accommodations assistance and utilities assistance. The remaining 30% of the total

spent has gone towards meal services, cleaning and personal hygiene supplies for survivors, equipment, and transportation and lodging for Salvation Army disaster personnel.

The remaining donations will largely be spent on recovery projects, which typically require significant financial resources.

That summarizes our activities and our distribution of donations to date. At this point, I'd like to share with you some of our thoughts and observations about the response to Hurricane Katrina.

Mr. Chairman, The Salvation Army has over a century of experience in responding to disasters. Still, as an organization we've learned valuable lessons from the our activities in the Gulf Coast – about how we can improve our own services and organizational structure to respond more efficiently and effectively when the next disaster strikes, and how NGOs and governments can better work together to achieve our common goals.

Thoughts and Observations on Katrina Response

Given the nature of our activities, our observations will apply almost exclusively to the mass care element of the government's response. In the National Response Plan, those activities fall under Emergency Support Function #6, Mass Care, Housing, and Human Services.

From our perspective, the types of services that were needed by Gulf Coast residents were no different than those provided to other victims of earlier hurricanes. The crucial differences between the response to Katrina and earlier hurricanes were the geographic scope of the disaster, the scale of the damage, and the multiple types of disasters triggered by a single event.

If Congress is inclined to make changes in the Federal Government's disaster response protocols, then The Salvation Army has identified four items that we would like you to consider.

1. Include NGO Community when Revising the National Response Plan

We have been heartened by calls to revise the National Response Plan and to better integrate charitable organizations into disaster response plans. The system as we know it doesn't work as well as it could. If I was limited to making a single suggestion today, it would be that the NGO community – all of the key players within the NGO community – should have a seat at the table as the National Response Plan is revised.

Why? For two reasons. First, many states and municipalities have used the National Response Plan as a template for crafting their own response plans. Consequently, any coordination problems in the federal plan are frequently repeated at the state and local levels.

Second, the National Response Plan makes a broad assumption about NGOs that I would challenge. The plan assumes that NGOs will always be able to respond and to fill in the service gaps. For a typical disaster, this would be a reasonable assumption. For a catastrophic event, however, this is a risky assumption. Simultaneous events would seriously degrade the NGO community's ability to respond, as would a disaster zone that threatened the lives of volunteers. If the NGO community is consulted during the revision process, then this type of assumption can be properly addressed.

2. Assign a Government Office as the Primary Agency Responsible for the National Response Plan's ESF #6

In our view, the role of government is to lead and coordinate. The role of organizations such as The Salvation Army is to support those efforts.

Yet under ESF #6, an NGO – rather than a federal agency – is charged with coordinating the mass care activities of other NGOs. The Salvation Army urges you to review this organizational structure carefully.

It might be worth noting that many states have taken a decidedly different path in designing their mass care plans. These states have tasked a state government agency with the responsibility for providing mass care coordination. Governors have recognized that they cannot order an NGO to perform a particular task. Moreover, there is

insufficient accountability if the NGO fails to perform as expected. Consequently many states have moved to ensure that the function is performed by tasking a state agency to do it.

If you are wondering how the federal government could possibly coordinate the NGO community, I would point out that FEMA already has a position called a Voluntary Agency Liaison or VAL. That position could be empowered to manage and coordinate the NGO community, and those federal employees could be held accountable for coordinating and for identifying existing or emerging gaps in services.

3. Incorporate NGOs in Exercises and Training

The single most effective vehicle for collaboration among government agencies and NGOs is on-going inter-agency cross-training.

Standardized training is needed because all of the NGOs – especially the well-intentioned organizations and individuals who are new entrants in the disaster services field – must understand the government’s emergency management systems and the language of those systems. Terms must have the same meaning when used by any government agency or NGO. It may even be prudent to establish a shared code of conduct for NGOs, similar to the code of conduct guiding the actions of international humanitarian relief organizations.

Congress could help this by conditioning the receipt of state and local training grants upon the inclusion of NGOs in planning and training.

4. Educate the Public

Just as there are roles for government and charitable organizations in disaster response, there is also a role for people who are moved to help in some way.

All too frequently, people and corporations will send unwanted items to a disaster site. Their motivation is laudable, but the arrival of unsolicited in-kind contributions at a disaster site is problematic. Volunteers have to be diverted from feeding and directly assisting victims to sort through truckloads of miscellaneous clothes and other un-needed items. Further, storage space in a disaster is scarce and expensive.

Likewise, the unexpected arrival of unsolicited and untrained volunteers is also problematic. As you can imagine, this situation taxes the ability of non-profits to effectively respond in the midst of a disaster.

The unvarnished truth of the matter is that the best response is to send cash and stay out of the disaster zone, particularly when personal safety and health are at risk.

The Federal Government should take the lead role in educating the American people about how to help disaster survivors. This could be achieved through public service announcements or by making prominent statements to that effect at the time of a disaster.

Plans for 2006

As I mentioned, The Salvation Army has made improvements in our own procedures so that we are better prepared for the coming hurricane season or any other disaster.

- We've learned that we can't do it all. No single organization can deliver all of the services needed by a distressed community or region.
- Instead, we focus our efforts on what we do best – providing food service, distributing essential relief supplies , and offering emotional and spiritual care to those in need.
- And we collaborate with other organizations to avoid duplication of resources and to expedite delivery of services, enhancing our collective ability to serve those in need. For example, The Southern Baptists frequently prepare the meals we serve from our canteens. The Volunteer housing mentioned previously is available for volunteer groups organized by other NGOs.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my statement, and I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.

