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Project HOPE dealing with Honduras

Following coup, Millwood's international health organization assesses next step

By Jason Kane
The Winchester Star

Millwood — It might be a coup in Honduras, violence in the Republic of Georgia, earthquakes in China, or hurricanes in the Gulf of Mexico.

When disaster strikes throughout the world, decisions of wide-reaching impact are made from the Clarke County community of Millwood — at the headquarters for the international health-aid organization Project HOPE (Health Opportunities for People Everywhere).

It happened most recently Monday morning, before the Honduran office for Project HOPE opened its doors for the day.

The coup had begun the day before, when President Manuel Zelaya was awakened by soldiers, taken to an air force plane, and flown to Costa Rica in his pajamas.

That afternoon, the Honduran National Congress announced that congressional leader Roberto Micheletti had been named the new president.

Back in Millwood, Stuart Myers, HOPE's senior vice president, had been following the news coverage and monitoring travel alerts from the U.S. Department of State.

Though the process had been relatively peaceful through Monday morning, tanks and soldiers were spotted in the streets of the capital of Tegucigalpa, protests were expected, and U.S. President Barack Obama had stated that he was deeply concerned about the Honduran officials' disregard for democratic norms.

Shortly before 8:30 a.m. local time — 6:30 a.m. in Honduras — Myers dialed HOPE's regional director in Mexico City and asked for a report on the Honduran staff in Tegucigalpa.

The call came back a short time later that the staff members there — about 40 — had been accounted for and were well.

In extreme situations of unrest, nonprofit organizations such as Project HOPE generally adhere to evacuation recommendations from the State Department in matters regarding their U.S. employees.

Sometimes that involves placing the American citizens on a plane and



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June 2009						
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Upcoming Events

- 6/30 [Shenandoah Valley Christian Chamber of Commerce](#)
- 7/2 [Wayside Theatre's Intern Cabaret Showcase](#)
- 7/4 [Middletown's 4th of July](#)

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flying them out of the conflict zone, and at other times it means packing everyone into HOPE vehicles and driving them across the border.

In this case, all of the staff members were Honduran citizens or nationals of surrounding countries. In evacuations, expatriates are generally given top priority because nationals are assumed to be in a safer position, Myers said.

"We followed the standard practice for any sort of political or social unrest — whether that's a coup around an election or major strikes," he said. "Our initial steps would be to close our offices, ask our employees to stay home, and maintain a low profile."

So Myers made the call to close the office indefinitely — until the situation improves.

HOPE has maintained a presence in Honduras since 1982, when the organization arrived to strengthen medical and nurse training at the nation's National Autonomous University.

Since then, it has offered programs in child health education for health professionals, as well as child survival programs; village health bank programs with a focus on domestic violence and human rights; humanitarian assistance in response to natural disasters; and HIV/AIDS care and education.

Given that HOPE has a presence in more than 35 countries throughout the globe, these types of emergency situations occur about once or twice per year, Myers said.

The last occurred during the outbreak of violence between Russia and the Republic of Georgia last summer.

"We're very hopeful that the situation will be safely resolved and we'll be able to get back to our work of helping the people of Honduras lead healthier lives," he said. "We'll reassess [today.]"

— Contact Jason Kane at jkane@winchesterstar.com



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