

January 27, 2010 - Italy - VIS spokesmen Danilo Gallinari and Rino Gattuso launch appeal for Salesians in Haiti.

(ANS – Rome) – Two great sporting champions -- Danilo Gallinari, the best Italian basketball player in the National Basketball Association, and Rino Gattuso, a midfield player who has helped write the history of Italian soccer over the last 15 years – have come together as spokesmen for the International Volunteers for Development (VIS: www.volint.it) in an appeal for support for the reconstruction of the Salesian works in Haiti and the re-birth of that nation's whole society, which is extremely poor and has serious problems of malnutrition, school drop-outs, and exploitation of the young.

The Salesians of Don Bosco have been in Haiti 80 years; there are 9 SDB and 13 FMA houses in Port-au-Prince and other parts of the country; 25,000 youngsters at the SDBs' Ecole Nationale des Arts et Métiers (ENAM) and other schools in the capital's slums who are given a roll of bread, chocolate, and a glass of milk for their breakfast every morning. A Salesian presence has been decisive in the growth and human development of Haitian young people.

On January 12 a large part of the Salesian schools and centers were destroyed; up to 500 youngsters and teachers were buried in ENAM's ruins – some of the recovered bodies are now interred in a common grave beside the school; 3,500 displaced people have been welcomed, assisted, and fed at the Center de Formation et de Recréation Don Bosco in Carrefour-Thorland, and thousands more taken in by the FMAs at their surviving houses.

The response of the whole Salesian world community, including VIS and the Don Bosco Network of NGOs, was immediate and will continue over the next months and years; the Salesian Family is aware that this tragedy could become for Haiti's people, so tried by endemic poverty, an opportunity to begin a sustainable, better future

Massimo Zortea, president of VIS declared: "The appeal for solidarity and generosity addressed by the Rector Major of the Salesians of Don Bosco, Fr. Pascual Chavez, to the Salesian Family of the whole world has had an immediate response from around the world. From the very start, Salesian centers in so many parts of the world, beginning with Africa, have shown practical signs of solidarity with the sufferings of the people of Haiti. To this unified choir have been united also the hearts of our two great champions, who have personally committed themselves to involve their own fans and all Italians in an important competition: rebuilding the hopes and the lives of Haiti."