

10-17-2016

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Recommended Citation

Fitzpatrick, Edward and Rodrigues, Jill, "RWU Alumni and Professor to Bring Disaster Aid Directly to Haiti" (2016). *Featured News Story*. 369.

https://docs.rwu.edu/weekatroger_featured_news/369

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RWU Alumni and Professor to Bring Disaster Aid Directly to Haiti

Delegation to leverage expertise in distributing humanitarian aid and local connections to deliver donations to those devastated by Hurricane Matthew



Bernard Georges '14 received this image of his hometown of Belle Anse, Haiti, following the destruction from Hurricane Matthew, along with pleas from family and friends to bring aid to their country. Image Credit: Courtesy of Bernard Georges

October 17, 2016 | Edward Fitzpatrick and Jill Rodrigues '05

PROVIDENCE, R.I. – Rather than ship donations overseas and hope it arrives to those in most need, two Roger Williams University alumni and a professor will soon travel to Haiti to hand-deliver money, medicine and food, using their expertise and local connections to ensure that aid gets to the people devastated by Hurricane Matthew.

Members of the executive board of [New Bridges for Haitian Success, Inc.](#) – Bernard Georges '14, Omar Bah '14 and RWU Associate Professor of History Autumn Quezada de Tavarez – will bring the cash and donated items directly to some of the hardest-hit areas of Haiti, which saw the destruction of entire villages, thousands of people displaced and estimates of more than 800 dead from the Category 4 hurricane that swept the country on Oct. 8.

The trip comes amid reports that some Haitians and Haitian-Americans are skeptical about whether the American Red Cross can effectively manage the humanitarian efforts in Haiti. That skepticism is fueled by a ProPublica and National Public Radio report that the Red Cross raised nearly half a billion

dollars but managed to build just six permanent homes following Haiti's 2010 earthquake. The Red Cross has said the report's "misleading headline" fueled "persistent myths" and that the money funded 100 humanitarian aid projects in Haiti.

"A lot of international aid does not report how the money is spent," said Georges, founder and executive director of New Bridges and a native of Haiti with local connections and family throughout the country. "We will provide ethical oversight of all donations. We will travel to Haiti and document everything that we distribute."

Bah, who serves as chairman of New Bridges, said many people are "outraged" by reports about what big organizations did with the money raised after Haiti's 2010 earthquake. With the assistance of [Quezada de Tavarez](#) – New Bridges executive board vice-chairwoman who, as an RWU professor, has led many trips delivering humanitarian aid to Central America, the Dominican Republic and Haiti – the team plans to film its trip, documenting that the cash, tents, First Aid kits and more, end up in the hands of those the donations are intended to help.

"We don't want to send a container to the family of a political leader," said Bah, who received a master's in public administration from RWU. "We want to make sure we are handing over the donated items to families that need them."

Much of Quezada de Tavarez's expertise comes from leading service trips abroad in rural villages for the RWU chapter of the [Foundation for International Medical Relief of Children](#). On these expeditions, Quezada de Tavarez immerses groups of students in the community to uncover what their needs are and provide what the people want rather than arrive with pre-conceived ideas.

"Whenever you come into a community, you have to be invited and you need to conduct an on-the-ground assessment of the situation – what are the needs and which families are in most need," Quezada de Tavarez said. "Where we're traveling will be Bernard's communities, and they have reached out to him to request these donations."

The University's FIMRC club is supporting the New Bridges team's efforts by collecting cash donations in the Dining Commons. New Bridges will continue to raise funds via [GoFundMe](#) until they depart for Haiti within a few weeks.

"It is our responsibility to do something to help," said Georges, who received a bachelor's in criminal justice and master's in public administration from RWU. "Some of my family members, friends and classmates have lost their homes. Bridges have collapsed and travel is cut off. This is so painful to see."

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