

## Haiti Aid Efforts: Agencies must Strike the Right Balance

Posted on Thursday 4th February 2010

Humanitarian workers must strike a reasonable balance between staying safe and saving lives, according to a University of Birmingham lecturer.

Moustafa Osman, who teaches Introduction to Disaster Management, at the University's International Development Department, travelled with colleagues from Islamic Relief, to Haiti to support the displaced and victims of the earthquake.

He revealed: "When I arrived, everyone was living on the streets. Public parks, car parks and even the main roads were filled with makeshift shelters made from bed sheets. In the midst of the chaos, aid workers were also figuring out how to survive."

When Osman's supply of 1,000 tents (donated by Islamic Relief) was stuck somewhere en route, he persuaded a Qatari search and rescue team that was leaving Haiti to donate their 82 tents.

He then got permission from the St. Claire Roman Catholic Church to use the field on their land for his camp.

But fights broke out when Osman's colleagues were distributing tents, with families trying to get the shelters and others competing for space.

Osman revealed: "There were several times that I felt my life was in danger. I confiscated a machete and temporarily evacuated some of my colleagues from the camp."

The Introduction to Disaster Management module at the University of Birmingham introduces students to the main principles of disaster management, with a focus on disaster response in the developing world. Moustafa Osman has extensive experience in responding to complex emergencies and natural disasters.

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