



Press Release - June 27, 2026

Venezuela Earthquakes - Rescue Response International (RRI)

Headline: Rescue Response International Deploys Urban Search and Rescue Team to Venezuela Following Catastrophic Earthquakes

Sub-Headline: U.S.-Based Humanitarian Organization Among First International Responders on the Ground



WASHINGTON, D.C. — Rescue Response International (RRI), the sister organization of Haiti Air Ambulance, a U.S.-based nonprofit humanitarian organization with over a decade of experience responding to disasters across Latin America and the Caribbean, deployed its first Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) teams to Venezuela in response to the devastating earthquakes that struck the country on June 24, 2026. Thanks to RRI and Burnaby USAR's partnership with AirLink, teams were able to quickly mobilize to country.

The first team departed from the Washington, D.C. area and is operating under the leadership of John Lyon, Executive Director of RRI, and Kit Hessel, a 27-year veteran of Fairfax County Fire and Rescue and former member of Virginia Task Force One/USA Task Force One with eleven international deployments with the US Government. The team includes

elite veterans of multiple major international disaster responses and specialists in urban search and rescue, civil-military coordination, and humanitarian operations.

“We are ready to hit the ground running and our teams are honored to be among the excellent cadre of USAR teams and NGOs responding,” said John Lyon, Executive Director of RRI.

A magnitude 7.2 earthquake followed 39 seconds later by a magnitude 7.5 mainshock, the strongest in Venezuela in over 125 years, struck near Yumare in Yaracuy State, with devastating effect across La Guaira, Caracas, Aragua, Carabobo, and Miranda. As of June 26, at least 920 people have been confirmed dead and over 3,360 injured, with at least 172 people still trapped under collapsed structures and over 50,000 reported unaccounted for ([OCHA](#)). The USGS has estimated a 44% chance the death toll will ultimately exceed 10,000 ([USGS](#)).

RRI has established contact with the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC), Virtual On-Site Operations Coordination Centre (Virtual OSOCC), Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, and U.S. Department of State Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) in-country. The team is fully integrated into the broader international response architecture, participating in UN Civil-Military Coordination calls and the WFP-led Logistics Working Group.

RRI's comparative advantage in this response lies in its ability to deploy highly trained teams rapidly into complex environments and to provide multi-modal logistics support including light, medium, and heavy lift aviation assets to move personnel and relief items to areas rendered inaccessible by disaster impacts. In the 2025 response to Hurricane Melissa in Jamaica, RRI led a consortium that conducted 243 flights, reached over 600,000 people across 67 distribution sites, and processed more than 12,700 food kits, 434 water filtration units, and nearly 3,200 tarp bales within 25 days of activation.

RRI staff include alumni of USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance, U.S. Southern Command, Virginia Task Force One, and United Nations agencies, bringing deep operational and diplomatic experience to the response. RRI is a standing member of the Regional Group on Risks, Emergencies and Disasters for Latin America and the Caribbean (REDLAC) and CDEMA-led working groups on response readiness.

The response in Venezuela is expected to require a sustained effort. RRI's assessment teams will conduct rapid damage and needs assessments upon arrival, with findings fed into targeting mechanisms to ensure no affected community is left behind. The organization's leadership is also working to mobilize additional resources to support first mile logistics, WASH, power, connectivity, and information management needs as the response evolves from search and rescue to relief delivery.

Those wishing to support RRI's response in Venezuela may donate [here](#).

About Rescue Response International: Rescue Response International (RRI) is a U.S.-registered nonprofit humanitarian organization operating at the intersection of aviation, logistics, and disaster response. Through its Haiti Air Ambulance (HAA) platform, RRI has maintained continuous operational presence in Haiti for over a decade. RRI has responded to disasters across Latin America and the Caribbean, including the 2021 Haiti earthquake, Hurricane Dorian in the Bahamas, and most recently Hurricane Melissa in Jamaica in 2025, where it served as lead of the Operation One Love consortium funded by the U.S. Department of State. RRI is a standing member of REDLAC and multiple CDEMA preparedness working groups.

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