

## **CQ HOMELAND SECURITY**

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### **Chertoff Lists Top Challenges for Integrating Faith-Based Groups**

By Daniel Fowler, CQ Staff

There are some challenges ahead for improving partnerships with faith-based and community organizations for disaster preparation and response, Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff said Monday, but such efforts can yield positive results.

"We want to work with you to improve this relationship," Chertoff said at a White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives roundtable titled "Partnerships in Emergency Preparedness, Response and Recovery: The Role of Faith-Based and Community Organizations in Building Resilient Communities."

"Among the challenges we have ahead of us are, we have to improve credentialing to make it possible for those who are volunteering to be properly credentialed so they can arrive at a place where there is a disaster or some kind of event and quickly get to work assisting those who need that help," he said.

Chertoff, who delivered the keynote address, said another challenge is further integrating logistics management to make it easier to connect "those who want to give assistance and those who need assistance."

"If we can get out of the way of that process and . . . and create a framework within which you can provide that assistance, using the tools of the Internet, I think that's a very positive thing," he said.

According to Chertoff, DHS wants to "leverage the capability of IT and networking so that we don't become a clog in the distribution of assistance, but rather an enabler."

In addition, he said DHS wants to work with non-governmental organizations to lay out best practices so they "can learn some of the lessons we've learned."

"Each time we go into a disaster, we're presented with new challenges and we have some very important lessons that we learn about how we can better respond," he said. "The bottom line is - and this is vividly illustrated by what's going on now in China as we speak - in a disaster, particularly one of catastrophic proportions, we cannot afford to leave any resources or tools on the table."

While he talked about some areas he would like to improve, Chertoff emphasized the importance of the nonprofit groups. "We are very mindful of the lessons learned from the experience of Hurricane Katrina," he said. "The White House report on Katrina specifically emphasized the importance of faith-based and community organizations in emergency preparedness and disaster response efforts."

The department's own Homeland Security Institute has also reinforced their importance, he said.

The institute found that "faith-based and community organizations undertake a surprisingly large, varied and demanding set of initiatives with extraordinary effectiveness. . . . We want to do everything we can to harness this energy and the broad network of faith-based and community

groups into our planning and execution so that we can bring the maximum resources to bear most quickly and most effectively in communities that are affected by disasters," Chertoff said.

The forum also included panels on the role of faith-based and community organizations in emergency preparedness and in disaster response and recovery.

"The fact that volunteers and donations has been added to the annex in the National Response Framework just deserves a round of applause," said panelist Wendy Spencer, chief executive officer of Volunteer Florida, the Governor's Commission on Volunteerism and Community Service.

"It's really great. It's exciting. We've come a long way and it's not by accident. It's because of the work that everyone has done individually and collectively. I think that the future is bright in this arena."

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