



Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi and U.S. President Barack Obama pose for a photo during the G-8 Summit.

In Italy for G-8, President lauds NIAF efforts in L'Aquila relief

By *Beatrice Santacroce*

While speaking to members of the press during a meeting with Italian President **Giorgio Napolitano** in Rome prior to the G-8 summit, U.S. President **Barack Obama** recognized the National Italian American Foundation's support of reconstruction efforts in L'Aquila, a city devastated by an earthquake in Italy's region of Abruzzo earlier this year.

Obama specifically noted joint efforts by NIAF and the U.S. State Department, coordinated through a recently formed public-private partnership, to raise funds for the University of L'Aquila and its displaced students.

"Obviously our hearts were broken by the death and destruction that took place after the earthquake. And I'm very pleased that the United States, like many other countries, will be contributing to help the rebuilding process," Obama said while addressing journalists at the Quirinale Palace on July 8. "In fact, we have, along with the National Italian American Foundation, already identified projects to help rebuild facilities at the University of L'Aquila and to provide scholarships and summer programs."

The U.S. State Department and NIAF announced the formation of this public-private partnership on May 27, 2009, combining their strengths to provide a generous American response to the people of Abruzzo. Through NIAF's fundraising efforts, the partnership will help displaced University of L'Aquila students and address the academic

institution's needs including the possible reconstruction of university facilities. The partnership also will provide a package of scholarships and strategic use of existing State Department exchanges, all while helping orchestrate appropriate relief efforts with civic programs in L'Aquila.

Following the press conference in Rome, President Obama traveled to L'Aquila for the Group of Eight (G-8) summit, held July 8-10, where he was able to view the earthquake's destruction first-hand with Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi. Leaders of the Group of Eight member nations – Canada, the Russian Federation, France, Germany, Japan, Italy, the United Kingdom and the United States – met in L'Aquila to discuss global issues and find resolutions to world-wide crises.

Berlusconi, acting as the president of the G-8, led discussions on how to restore economic confidence, provide rescue packages for third-world countries, ensure food safety, farm funding, and access to water in addition to how to reduce infant mortality, AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis.

The G-8 Summit is hosted each year by the rotating G-8 presidency. Italy has previously hosted the G-8 four times, most recently in Genoa in 2001. Although originally scheduled to occur on the Mediterranean island of Sardinia, the conference was relocated to L'Aquila following Abruzzo's tragic earthquake in April as a reminder that the area continues to need help and support as it rebuilds. ▲