

A Canadian Civil Society Statement to the Foreign Ministers Meeting on Haiti

Montreal, Canada, January 25, 2010

We recognize and welcome the strong leadership Canada has shown in hosting the Conference of Foreign Ministers. We commend the generosity shown by citizens and donors in a time of crisis. Following the devastating earthquake on January 12, the challenge of rebuilding Haiti is compounded by the cumulative effects of annual hurricanes, the 2008 food crisis, the global financial crisis, environmental degradation, and a violent political history – all of which have denied the majority of Haitian citizens access to their basic human rights.

But the international community, as a donor to Haiti over more than two decades, also bears responsibility for ill-conceived and poorly-conducted development, political interference, and unfulfilled promises. This time, the reconstruction of the country must be done in a way that is effective and accountable to all Haitians, addresses their immediate needs, and helps to create a positive environment for long term sustainable development. To achieve this, ongoing international relief efforts and planned support for reconstruction must be based on the priorities of, and led by, Haitians themselves.

Rather than an overly security-centric rebuilding of Haiti, which militarizes aid and undermines Haitian ownership, we urge solidarity, sovereignty, and respect for the rights of Haitians to be the guiding principles of international efforts. We recommend an approach that:

1. Prioritizes the Delivery of Humanitarian Assistance by Civilian Agencies;
2. Protects the Human Rights of Vulnerable Populations;
3. Ensures Haitian Leadership, Ownership and Decision-Making; and,
4. Focuses on Ending Poverty.

1. Prioritize the Delivery of Humanitarian Assistance by Civilian Agencies

While we acknowledge the challenges posed by the current operating environment in Haiti, aid efforts have been impeded by lack of access to airports and the slow delivery of supplies into the disaster site. The delivery and distribution of humanitarian assistance by civilian agencies should be considered the highest priority and we call on the Government of Canada to:

- Advocate strongly for a clear delineation of roles between civilian aid workers and military personnel involved in the relief effort. Military forces currently on the ground are providing crucial logistical and operational support, while civilian agencies have the experience and expertise needed to deliver assistance. Assistance currently being provided by military personnel should be handed over to civilian agencies as soon as possible, leaving the military to focus on providing logistical and operational support.
- Work with the US government, the Haitian government, the UN, and Group of Friends to ensure that civilian humanitarian supplies have the highest priority for the arrival, off loading, and dispatching of cargo, at Haiti's airports, ports and land borders.
- Support UN efforts to coordinate the current relief operations, while building the capacity of the Government of Haiti to lead and coordinate the reconstruction and recovery efforts.

2. Ensure Haitian Leadership, Ownership and Decision-Making

Haitians, themselves, were the first responders to the earthquake. Although local organizations have been affected by the earthquake, the considerable capacity and skills of Haitians must be respected and included in relief efforts. To this end, we call on the Government of Canada to:

- ❑ Work to ensure Haitians, wherever possible, are leading relief and reconstruction efforts.
- ❑ Fund Haitian organizations, particularly women's groups, in relief, recovery, and reconstruction.
- ❑ Seek opportunities for including the Haitian diaspora in Canada in relief and recovery efforts, particularly those with French and Creole language skills.
- ❑ Prioritize the rebuilding of Haitian government ministries and departments that are responsible for providing basic services.
- ❑ Support Haitian community-driven efforts to improve the educational, food security and livelihood status of Haitian citizens.

3. Protect the Human Rights of Vulnerable Civilians

Haiti's vulnerable populations will require special protection measures. 36% of Haiti's population is under 15. Persons with disabilities, including those newly disabled by the earthquake, will find it difficult to access food, water and shelter. Women and girls are at an increased risk of sexual and gender-based violence. We call on the Government of Canada to work with other donors and civil society to:

- ❑ Ensure the principles of impartiality, neutrality, independence, and humanity guide the ongoing relief effort and that humanitarian and development activities are consistent with international humanitarian and human rights law.
- ❑ Prioritize the delivery of humanitarian assistance to vulnerable groups such as unaccompanied minors, the disabled, elderly, and women/girls, and ensure that their needs and priorities are addressed in the planning for Haiti's recovery, reconstruction, and longer-term development. To this end:
 - Ensure shelter and emergency camps are planned and built with disability access in mind.
 - Include persons with disabilities and organizations focused on disability rights in all initiatives and stages of relief, recovery, reconstruction, and longer-term development planning.
 - Establish rapid response mechanisms and measures to ensure the rights of all Haitian children are protected with priorities on preventing child trafficking and a moratorium on new international adoptions.
 - Encourage all countries contributing to the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) train their personnel on preventing, protecting, and responding to sexual and gender-based violence prior to their deployment.

4. Ending Poverty

Poverty and fragility in Haiti is multi-faceted and includes significant tensions between a wealthier elite and poorer Creole-speaking parts of the population. Much of Haiti's income is allocated to annual debt service payments amounting to some \$60-\$80 million a year, limiting Haiti's capacity to invest in its own development. Real and sustained recovery and reconstruction will not be possible without addressing Haiti's longer term development as well as environmental and governance issues. We commend the Government of Canada for cancelling, in July 2009, \$2.3 million in debt owed by Haiti and call on the Government to:

- Advocate for the immediate and unconditional cancellation of all bilateral and multilateral debt owed by Haiti. To this end,
 - Call on the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to immediately turn the recent US\$100 million emergency loan to Haiti into a grant provided without any conditions.
 - Call on the rest of Haiti's multilateral creditors, in particular The Inter American Development Bank and the World Bank, to immediately cancel outstanding debts.
- Ensure longer term assistance addresses both the immediate and structural causes of poverty in Haiti while working to provide relief and reconstruction to areas directly affected by the earthquake.
- Continue providing development aid to parts of the country not impacted by the earthquake, but still vulnerable to poverty.
- Support environmental programs aimed at agriculture and reforestation.

As Haiti rebuilds, international donors and the Group of Friends, must ensure the voices and the perspectives of Haiti's poor are heard and their rights respected. Haitian ownership and leadership, through the government, civil society, the diaspora, and the majority – women and men, girls and boys living in poverty, must be central in all efforts.

Amnesty International Canada
Canadian Council for International Co-operation
Care Canada
Council of Canadians with Disabilities
Centre for International Studies and Cooperation
Centre for Research on Latin America and the Caribbean (CERLAC)
Development and Peace
Halifax Initiative Coalition
Horizons of Friendship
KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives
MATCH International Centre
Mennonite Central Committee Canada
Oxfam Canada
Oxfam Quebec
Plan Canada
Public Service Alliance of Canada
Social Justice Committee of Montreal
UNICEF Canada
York Haiti Solidarity Committee

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