

News Release

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19 Canadian aid groups press for action at Montreal conference

International leaders gathering in Montreal to discuss the future of Haiti's reconstruction must press for the participation of Haitian people, promote the interests of women and youth and coordinate their efforts under UN leadership, Canadian aid agencies urged today.

"There are important lessons from two decades of development work in Haiti," said Gerry Barr, President and CEO of the Canadian Council International Co-operation. "Reconstruction of the country must be done in a way that is effective and accountable to all Haitians, addresses immediate needs and helps to lay the foundation for long term development, led by Haitians themselves."

In a statement to foreign ministers meeting Monday in Montreal, the group of 19 agencies called for greater clarity in the roles of civilian aid workers and military personnel and called for Haitians themselves - both in the country and within the diaspora - to lead reconstruction efforts wherever possible.

"Haiti needs to be re-imagined from the bottom up and we need to ensure the voices and the perspectives of the poor are respected," said Robert Fox, Executive Director of Oxfam Canada, a member of the HUMANITARIAN COALITION. "The government, organized civil society, the diaspora and women and men, girls and boys living in poverty must be heard and must play a role."

The organizations called on policy makers from the sixteen countries, dubbed the "Friends of Haiti," to lay the groundwork for Haiti's reconstruction with complete debt forgiveness, giving aid in the form of grants and not loans.

"Real and sustained recovery and reconstruction cannot happen and will not be possible without addressing Haiti's longer term development, environmental and governance issues," said Michel Verret, interim Executive Director of Oxfam-Quebec.

"In this immediate aftermath of this disaster, we've seen governments, aid agencies and Haitians work together to help save lives. This collaboration and partnership must continue beyond the emergency phase into the rebuilding and reconstruction of Haiti," said Kevin McCort, President and CEO of CARE Canada. "Most importantly, we must make sure that the Haitian people are equal partners in the planning, deciding and doing."

The statement also encourages the Friends to set out clear security guidelines, to ensure the people of Haiti remain safe as they carry on with the reconstruction of their country, particularly women and girls, who must play a vital role.

As the country moves from rescue to relief to reconstruction phases, there must also be a coordinated effort to ensure Haitians - particularly women and youth - have a stable food supply and possess the tools and means to rebuild their livelihoods, the statement reads.

The earthquake in Haiti is likely to be the single largest aid effort since the tsunami in East Asia and will require an extraordinary effort by the UN, aid groups and governments.

Aid must strengthen existing government infrastructure, not work outside or around it, and the leadership of the response must remain in the hands of the United Nations and the Government of Haiti. The group also called for more funding to women's groups who are leading and coordinating relief efforts.

Haitian Prime Minister Jean-Max Bellerive and U.S. State Secretary Hillary Clinton are expected to attend. Founded in the early 1990s, "Friends of Haiti" is an informal gathering of like-minded nations that meet on the margins of the UN Security Council.

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