

Vancouver BC, Toronto ON
November 15, 2011

To: Members of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, House of Commons
Re: Commentary on your meeting of October 18, 2011 concerning Haiti

Dear Members of the Committee,

We are writing to you on behalf of the Canada Haiti Action Network (CHAN) in response to [your two-hour meeting of October 18](#) in which you took evidence and discussed the situation in Haiti. In our view, the evidence you received on October 18 did not describe as fully as needed the urgent and complex situation in Haiti.

A CHAN fact-finding delegation to Haiti in June 2011 produced a 17-page report that was e-mailed to you on September 16.¹ In this report, we outline serious concerns about the state of aid and reconstruction in Haiti as reported to us by those with whom we met in Haiti, including civil society and professional organizations as well as representatives and residents of six displaced-persons camps.

The concerns that we heard are more compelling than ever as time goes on and as conditions in some important areas stagnate or deteriorate. We outline seven areas of concern below, sometimes elaborating upon but other times contrasting what was reported to your committee.

1. Housing and shelter

Reported: The housing situation is slowly improving.

Fact: 600,000 Haitians still living in camps, many more moved back into unsafe homes or unplanned settlements, and home or shelter construction slow or non-existent.

Progress remains painfully slow. Six hundred thousand people are still living in the camps of earthquake displaced persons. To this can be added hundreds of thousands more people, including:

- Those who have moved back into condemned or severely damaged homes. The only rigorous survey of these numbers was conducted in early 2011.² At that time, 64% of the estimated 80,00 condemned buildings (red coded) and 85% of the estimated 99,000 severely damaged (yellow coded) buildings had been re-inhabited.
- The mass migration of people into unplanned settlements surrounding the planned but stalled settlement of Corail Cesseless to the north of Port au Prince. While the official Corail site houses some 7,000 or so residents, the surrounding unofficial settlements (Canaan, Jerusalem, Onaville), to which no services are to be delivered by decision of the Haitian government, number in the many tens of thousands and are still growing.
- Those who have moved out of the earthquake zone, placing demands on already under-serviced areas of Haiti.

Mr. McCort of CARE Canada presented a rather positive interpretation of the situation with damaged homes (0955 mark), stating that retrofit work was underway. But retrofits are happening in exceptionally small numbers and only by those with funds to afford them (that is, a minority of the population). Former U.S President Jimmy Carter commented on November 7 during a one-week visit to Haiti on behalf of Habitat Humanity that little permanent housing for Haiti's poor majority is in evidence.³

Mr. McCort and Mr. Sauvé of the Canadian Red Cross (CRC) spoke of the temporary shelters that have been built in Haiti, numbering several tens of thousands. This is an important achievement, but the number is nonetheless dwarfed by the numbers of displaced still requiring shelter, leave alone permanent housing. And, the task of repairing homes and building new ones, by which is necessarily included the revitalization of neighbourhoods and communities, is arguably still at beginning stages.

Mr. Sauvé indicated a big problem confronting home construction in Haiti (1030), which is the sourcing of building materials. One of the consequences of the damage and destruction to Haiti's national economy over recent decades has been the decline of its building materials and house construction capacities. (The country's only cement-producing factory, CINA, was once the largest of its kind in the Caribbean. It was privatized in 1999 under U.S. pressure and currently operates under Columbian ownership; to what degree, we do not know.) The international shelter assistance effort must devote resources to improving Haitian capacity to produce building materials from local sources.

2. Health care:

Reported: Cholera, at least in camps, is under control.

Fact: Despite post-earthquake successes in health care, cholera threatens a large number of Haiti's poor and vulnerable.

While the story of health services in Haiti can be said to be one of the success stories of post-earthquake aid, the situation remains perilous. The most recent bulletin of the Office of Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs of the UN⁴ presents an alarming description of the health conditions and trends in Haiti's earthquake survivor camps and in overall cholera treatment and prevention in the country. You can read a summary of the report in this footnoted link.⁵

The situation remains perilous with the cholera epidemic. Mr. McCort reported to you (1040), "One thing worth noting is that the cholera epidemic occurred 10 months after the earthquake and was largely prevented through effective coordination by international humanitarian agencies in the IDP camps." He was referring to conditions in the camps of survivors. We don't have exact figures for cholera in the camps and accept his claim. But in Haiti overall, an astounding 5% of the population has been stricken with cholera and more than 6,500 have died. It is the largest cholera epidemic in the world in many years.

To cite two statistics of concern in the aforementioned OCHA bulletin:

- At the beginning of 2011, there were 128 international organizations providing assistance for cholera treatment and prevention. By August, the number had declined to 48 organizations.

- By August, the number of people in the camps with easy access to potable water had declined to only seven percent.

Haiti's water authority, DINEPA, has announced it is ending potable water delivery to 17 camps at the end of November due to declining funds.

We are concerned with the paucity of information provided to the Committee concerning the exact scope of cholera prevention services being provided by the CRC. And we have a specific concern about the cholera treatment center (CTC) established by the CRC in Carrefour (district of Port au Prince) in December 2010. Mr. Sauvé (1010) and Ms. Norton of CIDA (0935) reported to you that the Carrefour CTC continues to operate, now under the auspices of the Haitian Red Cross (HRC). But we visited the site of the center on June 28, 2011 and discovered that it had been *closed* more than two months earlier. An HRC official confirmed this to us, as did a director of the neighbouring CTC operated by Doctors Without Borders.

The HRC representative told us that her agency was unsuccessful in convincing the CRC to keep the center open. In May, cholera cases in Carrefour soared following heavy, seasonal rains. (The district is particularly prone to cholera due to the large amounts of water that pool in the streets as a result of broken water mains and poor drainage of rainwater.)

The website of the CRC continues to state that the center in question was successfully transferred over to management by the HRC.⁶ We were unable to receive a satisfactory explanation from the CRC office in Ottawa when we phoned about this discrepancy following our return from Haiti.

The three largest international providers of health care in Haiti are the medical mission of the Government of Cuba, the global health agency Partners In Health and its Haitian Partner, Zanmi Lasante, and Doctors Without Borders. All three providers work closely with the Ministry of Population and Public Health of the Government of Haiti. Two of them—Cuba and PIH/ZL—have for many years now been training Haitians to become doctors, nurses and other health professionals. Cuba's role in Haiti health care is recounted in a just-published article in the *New York Times*; among other facts, it reports that the death toll from cholera in the areas served by the Cuban mission is a fraction of the country-wide rate.⁷

At the March 31, 2010 International Donors Conference on Haiti, the Government of Cuba proposed a bold plan to establish a comprehensive, public health care system in Haiti.⁸ PIH/ZL will soon open its second training hospital in Haiti (located in Mireblais, just north of Port au Prince) and it is undertaking the first, large scale vaccination program against cholera. We suggest that one or more of these organizations be invited to your next session on Haiti to provide additional overview of the health situation and needs in Haiti.

3. Food and nutrition:

Reported: Access to food has stabilized.

Fact: Food insecurity, a severe problem before the earthquake, has worsened.

Ms. Kleschnitzki of UNICEF Canada reported to the Committee (1010) that, "the nutrition situation was stabilized" in Haiti in 2010. But in 2011, nutrition indicators are far from stable.

The aforementioned OCHA bulletin reports that according to a national survey conducted in April and May of this year by the National Coordination for Food Security in Haiti, nearly one million people have no regular access to basic food staples and 4.5 million Haitians, approximately half of the population, are food insecure. That's up from somewhere between 2.5 and 3.3 million food insecure people one year ago and 1.9 million in July 2009.⁹

4. Human Rights:

Reported: President Martelly and Canada are committed to rule of law in Haiti.

Fact: Jean Claude Duvalier has yet to face justice, prisoners are living in abhorrent conditions, and President Martelly wants to re-establish the Haitian Army.

The issue of human rights was not examined in detail by your session. We urge you to take a close look at this aspect of the situation in Haiti at your earliest convenience and to invite the human rights organizations of Haiti to report to you.

Mr. Allen of DFAIT reported (0855) that Haiti's recently elected president, Mr. Martelly, has a strong commitment to "rule of law" in Haiti. And, "Canada has already invested significantly in the rule of law" (since 2006).

As our June fact-finding report examined in some detail, the human rights situation in Haiti remains very troubling:

- * The former dictator of Haiti, Jean Claude Duvalier, has returned from exile and lives in a state of near-impunity. To date, the Haitian justice system has been unable to bring him to trial for grave human rights violations during his tyrannical reign.

- * Conditions in Haiti's prisons are appalling. They are grossly overcrowded, a dire threat to human health, and an estimated 80% of prisoners are in preventive detention. Currently, 13 police officers are on trial in Les Cayes on charges of perpetrating a massacre of prisoners in the days following the earthquake.¹⁰ Government, police and international officials attempted to cover up the massacre.

- * Michel Martelly has drafted plans to restore the Haitian Army, an institution that was dissolved in 1995 by then-President Jean-Bertrand Aristide due to its long and exclusive history as a human-rights violating agency.

- * President Michel Martelly has surrounded his office with advisors from the time of the Duvalier tyranny.¹¹

- * On October 27, in a violation of the protection afforded to elected members of the Chamber of Deputies and Senate of Haiti by the Haitian Constitution, Chamber Deputy Arnel Bélizaire was arrested and imprisoned for 24 hours. The arrest followed a verbal altercation between the deputy and President Martelly two weeks earlier during which the President swore to have the deputy arrested.¹²

Canada has invested heavily in police and judicial institutions in Haiti during the past five years, and stretching back long before that, but there is little evidence that this investment has produced justice for the Haitian people. Indeed, the submission by Canada to the Universal Periodic Review session on Haiti of the UN Human Rights Council on October 13, 2011 acknowledges

the failings of judicial, police and prison institutions in Haiti. (We hope this brief will be made available to members of the committee and posted to a publicly-accessible website.)

5. Foreign military occupation:

Reported: MINUSTAH is essential to Haiti's security.

Fact: MINUSTAH is becoming increasingly unpopular and stands accused of suppression of political expression, killings of community leaders and innocent bystanders, sexual assault or enticement of women and girls, and cholera.

Mr. Allen reported that “despite some recent criticisms” of the UN Security Council police/military force in Haiti (MINUSTAH), its presence remains “essential” for the future of Haiti. We ask, “Essential to whom?” Growing numbers of Haitian people are demanding that the force be withdrawn, for reasons that include:

* According to many critics and a recent study on the subject, MINUSTAH's very presence in Haiti is a violation of international and Haitian law.¹³

* The force stands accused of suppression of political protest and violent attacks and killings of political dissidents, particularly, but not limited to, the period of 2004-06.

* The force has a record of sexual assault against Haitian citizens. In November, 2007, 108 members of its Sri Lanka contingent were withdrawn from Haiti amidst allegations of sexual crimes, including enticement of Haitian girls. Five members of Uruguay's MINUSTAH mission were withdrawn from Haiti last month and are standing trial in Uruguay for the sexual assault of a Haitian teenage boy in July 2011. (This is a rare case of MINUSTAH soldiers facing justice for alleged crimes committed in Haiti—the ‘Status of Forces’ agreement that governs MINUSTAH's conduct in Haiti specifically exempts its members from being subject to Haitian law.)

* Perhaps most gravely, MINUSTAH stands condemned of negligence in the introduction of cholera to Haiti by its Nepalese contingent in October 2010. A lawsuit by 5,000 victims of cholera was initiated on November 8, 2011.¹⁴

There is growing pressure by their populations on the governments of Latin America that participate in MINUSTAH to end their participation in the mission.

6. Education

Reported: Plans to subsidize education.

Fact: Less than half of children in displacement camps are in school.

According to OCHA, only 48% of children in the displaced camps are in school. Prior to the earthquake, this was the national rate of children in school.

According to the “Let's Talk Development” blog of the World Bank, 80% of Haiti's schools, approximately 4,200 in number, were damaged or destroyed by the earthquake,. Only 18% of damaged schools have been repaired or rehabilitated, according to OCHA. UNICEF reports on its website, “It is hoped 200 semi-permanent schools across the country will be reconstructed by the end of June 2011.”

Ms. Kleschnitzki cited 2010 figures to you concerning the numbers of students returned to school (1015). She stated that UNICEF has supported President Martelly's initiative to subsidize school

fees for 750,000 students by distributing school supplies. We note that the President's plan, while laudable, is only just underway.

7. Women and girls

Reported: Sexual violence is being addressed at a number of levels.

Fact: Haitian women and girls are facing unprecedented social hardship, including sexual violence and inadequate security and social support.

We end this letter by bringing to your attention the truly dire conditions of women and children in the camps and in wider society. They are suffering unprecedented levels of hardship, including sexual violence. Haitian and UN police authorities have come under heavy criticism for a seeming inability to take decisive measures to provide security. A detailed, 78-page report on the condition of women and children was published by Human Rights Watch on August 31, 2011 and warrants careful reading, attention and urgent action.¹⁵

Conclusion

We invite member of the Committee to contact us for further information and for further reference to information sources in Haiti. We encourage you to continue periodic examinations of the situation in Haiti and to make recommendations to the Government of Canada. Please visit [the website of the Canada Haiti Action Network](#) for updates on the situation in Haiti, reports on the social and human rights situation, and links to the vital Haitian and international human rights and social advocacy organizations.

Sincerely,

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cc Miriam Burke, Clerk of the Committee

Members of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, House of Commons, Canada, November 2011:

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Clerk of the Committee: Miriam Burke

Notes:

¹ [Canadian Fact-Finding Delegation Reports on Post-Earthquake Haiti](#). En français: [Une délégation d'enquête canadienne présente la situation d'Haïti après le séisme](#)

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- ² [Building Assessment and Removal \(BARR\) Study, March 2011](#)
- ³ [Jimmy Carter: Few houses built for poor Haitians](#), AP report, Nov 7, 2011.
- ⁴ [OCHA Humanitarian Bulletin, Sept 21-Oct. 18, 2011](#)
- ⁵ [Health Conditions Declining Sharply in Haiti's Earthquake Survivor Camps, Agencies Warn](#)
- ⁶ [The Cholera Treatment Center Passes Into the Hands of the Haitian Red Cross](#), Canadian Red Cross web posting, April 18, 2011
- ⁷ [Cuba Takes Lead Role in Haiti's Cholera Fight](#), New York Times, Nov 7, 2011
- ⁸ [Cuba Presents a Bold Plan for a Comprehensive Health Care System in Haiti](#)
- ⁹ See also, "[Food Security: Key Statistics, prior to the earthquake in January 2010](#)", by the Office of the Special Envoy on Haiti.
- ¹⁰ [Haitian Inmate Recalls Police Shooting in Closely Watched Trial](#), Washington Post, Nov 7, 2011. And, listen to a [Nov 10, 2011 story on CBC Radio One's Dispatches](#) with the New York Times reporter who broke the story of the massacre.
- ¹¹ [Haiti government links to old regime prompt scrutiny](#), Miami Herald, Oct 14, 2011
- ¹² [The Arrest of Deputy Arnel Bélizaire](#)
- ¹³ [MINUSTAH: Keeping the peace, or conspiring against it? A review of the human rights record of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti, 2010-2011](#), published Oct 4, 2011
- ¹⁴ [Over 5,000 Haitian Cholera Victims Sue UN, Seeking Justice](#), Nov 8, 2011
- ¹⁵ ["Nobody Remembers Us": Failure to Protect Women's and Girls' Right to Health and Security in Post-Earthquake Haiti](#), by Human Rights Watch, August 30, 2011.