

Vancouver, Winnipeg, Toronto, Montreal
November 17, 2011

To: Members of the Parliament and Senate of Canada
Subject: Concern about social and human rights situation in Haiti, and Canadian government policy in Haiti

Dear Member of Parliament or Senator,

We are writing this letter to provide you with a brief overview of the situation in Haiti and to urge a change in Canadian government policy that would see more robust assistance for social and human development in that country.

1. The critical situation in Haiti

The January 12, 2010 earthquake in Haiti greatly magnified the country's social and economic difficulties. Today, in addition to a lingering political paralysis in its national government and the immense, physical task of rebuilding the country, Haitians face a deadly and so far intractable cholera epidemic.

Haiti needs continued and substantial humanitarian assistance. The recently announced "Mama ak timoun an sante" (Healthy Mothers and Children) program that is being assisted with \$20 million from CIDA is a good initiative in the health care field by Canada. Further investments in health care are urgently needed to battle cholera and other endemic weaknesses in public health delivery in Haiti.¹

2. Canada and "security"

The Government of Canada has declared its primary role in Haiti as provision of "security," defined as training and equipping police and prison institutions.² It has spent large sums on prison and police equipping and training (although we note an irony that even misguided programs such as these are unfulfilled³).

This preoccupation with security is providing little justice. The Canadian-assisted prison system holds nearly 80 percent of its prisoners in preventive detention, without formal charge or trial.⁴ Former dictator Jean Claude Duvalier is living in a state of near-impunity following his return to Haiti in January of this year.⁵ Women and girls in the camps of earthquake survivors are suffering unprecedented levels of sexual violence.⁶

The security regime that Canada assisted in imposing in 2004 following the overthrow of Haiti's elected government, specifically the 13,000-strong UN Security Council police/military occupation force known as MINUSTAH, is facing a groundswell of popular anger and calls for its withdrawal from the country.⁷ The Latin American countries that contribute personnel to MINUSTAH are facing increasing domestic pressure to end their participation.⁸ The force stands accused of neglect in causing the introduction of cholera to Haiti and is now facing a legal action by 5,000 Haitian complainants.⁹

3. An unpopular governing regime

Haiti's governing authority is mired in difficulty. It is the product of a Canada-financed and supported exclusionary presidential and legislative election concluded on March 20, 2011.

Leading up to the first-round, November 28, 2010 vote, reputable human rights organizations in Haiti and internationally as well as 45 members of the U.S. Congress called for the election to be scrapped and held at a later date. President Michel Martelly was the third place finisher in the first round but emerged victorious in March 2011 because of key international backing from the OAS and the U.S.¹⁰

On December 13, 2010, Canada's Parliament held an emergency debate on Haiti in the wake of the fiasco of the first round vote. Only one MP raised doubts about the legitimacy of the November vote, Mr. Denis Coderre of the Liberal Party.

Following his electoral victory, President Martelly took more than six months to nominate a prime minister, the first step required in the formation of a government. Mr. Martelly's lack of popular support (less than 25% of Haitians participated in the November 2010 and March 2011 voting rounds) and his ties to Haiti's Duvalierist tyranny were major reasons for the delay as he sought, unsuccessfully, to pressure the Legislature and Senate to accept his first two nominees for the post.¹¹

The failure by Mr. Martelly to exercise compromise in governing Haiti has been noted in the North American¹² and international press.¹³ Overall, his views and those of the small Haitian elite he represents are out of step with the social justice sentiments of the majority of the Haitian people.

4. Parliament needs more and better information

On October 18, 2011, the new Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development of the House of Commons held its first discussion on Haiti. It received incomplete information on the actual situation in Haiti. Please find appended a letter on this subject that is addressed to members of the Committee and written by several of the authors of this letter.

Canada submitted an informed brief to the Universal Periodic Review session on Haiti of the UN Human Rights Council on October 13, 2011. The brief acknowledges the failings of judicial, police and prison institutions in Haiti and thus, implicitly, the failings of close to eight years of Canadian policy (intervention) in this field.

Canada should assist the chronically weak and under-funded Haitian judicial system to seek justice for the past victims of Jean-Claude Duvalier and undertake other, crucially needed judicial services. It is not for lack of will on the part of many Haitian authorities that justice is in such poor shape; it is a lack of resources as well as harmful foreign interference that lies at the root of much of Haiti's justice woes.

Canada should heed the growing numbers of Haitians who are demanding the withdrawal of MINUSTAH from Haiti. The funding it consumes should be applied to human development programs.

Please find appended to this letter a more detailed summary of our concerns about Haiti, in the form of the [aforementioned letter to the members of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development](#). For ongoing information as well as background on Haiti, please consult the website of our national advocacy network, the Canada Haiti Action Network, www.canadahaitiaction.ca.

Sincerely,

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Notes:

¹ [Partners In Health Hosts Comprehensive Discussion on Cholera, Oct 18, 2011](#)

² [New Canadian-funded prison to open soon in Haiti](#)

³ [Three years, \\$18M later Haiti's police academy remains unbuilt](#)

⁴ [International Center for Prison Studies \(University of Essex\)](#)

⁵ [Haiti's 'Baby Doc' Dines Out As Prosecution Stalls; Amnesty International Urges Haiti to Bring "Baby Doc" to Justice](#) and [Comprehensive Update on Jean-Claude 'Baby Doc' Duvalier Prosecution](#), by Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti

⁶ [Human Rights Watch Report, Aug 31, 2011: "Nobody Remembers Us"](#)

⁷ [Protest demands withdrawal of MINUSTAH from Haiti](#)

⁸ [Latin Americans Express Indignation at Renewal of MINUSTAH Mandate](#)

⁹ [Haiti Group Demands UN Pay for Cholera outbreak](#), CBC News, Nov 8, 2011

¹⁰ [Canada's Parliament Debates Haiti](#)

¹¹ [Haiti government links to old regime prompt scrutiny](#)

¹² <http://www.thestar.com/opinion/editorials/article/1066878--haiti-s-stalled-recovery>

¹³ <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/latin-america-caribbean/haiti/b025-postquake-haiti-security-depends-on-resettlement-and-development.aspx>