



18 May 2007

Dear member of Congress:

We, the undersigned organizations and individuals, are writing today to encourage you to **support House Resolution 241**. House Resolution 241 would direct the United States Executive Directors at the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and the Inter-American Development Bank to use the voice, vote, and influence of the United States to **immediately cancel Haiti's debts** to those institutions.

We note that all of these institutions have already agreed to cancel Haiti's debts. They recognize that Haiti's debt burden is unsustainable, and that the funds used to service this debt would be better served being used to save lives and educating Haiti's future leaders. However, under the processes that have been proposed Haiti will have to wait at least three years before receiving this debt cancellation. A three-year delay means that people will continue to suffer from lack of access to health services and education budgets will be strained. The reason for the delay is the insistence by these institutions that Haiti undergo further policy and structural reform under the framework of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative.

We ask you to consider the following:

Haiti has been undergoing market oriented structural reform for over twenty years. Indeed, Haiti already has the lowest public sector employment rate in the Western Hemisphere, as well as the lowest average tariffs. Less than twenty percent of Haiti's children are able to attend public schools, and access to health services is seriously restricted.

The lowering of tariffs on agriculture have generated mass displacement in rural areas, adding pressure on already under-funded public services, particularly health and education, in urban areas. Since 1986, Haiti has averaged annual growth rates of *negative* two-percent, so that today eighty-percent of Haiti's people live on less than \$2 a day – fifty percent on less than \$1 dollar a day. In other words the policy reforms that have been mandated in Haiti over the last twenty years by these same institutions have not worked. What can Haiti gain by three more years of the same?

Over half of Haiti's current debt to the World Bank, IMF, and Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) was accumulated by the Duvalier dictatorship and the military juntas that governed Haiti after his departure. Less than 50 percent of IDB loans and only 35 percent of

World Bank loans that Haiti is currently being asked to pay off were actually distributed to an elected government.

Haiti will pay \$56-70 million a year to service debts to the IDB and World Bank, a total of \$170-200 million over the next three years. This is equivalent to the annual budgets for education and health combined (approximately \$180 million a year).

What does three years mean?

The most recent World Health Report (2006) estimated that Haiti's government spends \$10 per capita on health – or \$83 million a year. (The U.S. government spends \$2,500 per capita on health.) With this budget, Haiti has 25 doctors, 11 nurses, and 1 dentist per 100,000 people. Only 24% of women are accompanied by a trained health provider during childbirth and only 18% of births happen in a health facility. Haiti has the highest HIV/AIDS infection rate and the lowest coverage of potable water in the Western Hemisphere. The low levels of public expenditures on health also means that services nearly always require a fee – which puts even the most basic healthcare out of reach of the majority of Haitians.

As a result, between now and the end of fiscal year 2010 in Haiti 90-100,000 children will die before reaching the age of 11 months and another 30-40,000 will die before reaching the age of 5 years. Haiti's under-five mortality rate is 1500% higher than in the United States. Based on the number of live births in the United States each year a comparable under-five mortality rate would translate into 1.5-1.8 million children dying over the same period of time – 1,600 a day!

Approximately 6,000 women will die during childbirth in Haiti between now and October 2010. In the United States, with 35 times the population, the total number of deaths will likely be less than 2,000. At the same maternal mortality rate as Haiti, nearly 100,000 women would die in the United States during childbirth over a comparable period.

\$180 million will not change all of this overnight. But it could have a dramatic impact now in extending health services to thousands of people.

In conclusion, since the World Bank, IMF, and IDB have already agreed to cancel Haiti's debt, and considering that remaining debt service is largely on debts accumulated by former dictators, we ask you to support House Resolution 241 and work to ensure that the people of Haiti are not forced to wait three more years to receive this debt cancellation.

Sincerely,

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