

April 21, 2010

Dear Member of Congress:

Shelter and housing are the primary concerns for 1.5 million Haitians today. Although 75 percent of the displaced population has received some form of shelter material, namely plastic tarps and a limited number of tents, the materials are not sufficient to withstand the current rain and hurricane season.

These forms of shelter promote insecurity by lacking sufficient privacy. This is particularly of concern for vulnerable populations, including women, children and the elderly. Also, the overcrowding of groups of people is heightening the risk and spread of water-borne illnesses. Investment to create transitional housing and shelter that provide safe conditions and promote human dignity must be a priority.

With the rainy period upon us and the subsequent hurricane season, the immediate relocation of many spontaneous communities is crucial. Amnesty International estimates that at least 200,000 people in seven Port-au-Prince camps will be directly affected by the rainy season and their relocation must be prioritized.¹ These numbers point to only a fraction of people within and outside of Port-au-Prince living in precarious locations who will require assistance to relocate.

Reports from Haiti indicate forced displacement is happening throughout Port-au-Prince in violation of international guidelines for the treatment of IDPs² and recent international agreements regarding the treatment of quake victims in Haiti. According to USAID and UN-OCHA reports, working in collaboration with the Government of Haiti (GoH), U.N. agencies and international partners have developed a five-option framework to allow displaced persons residing in flood-prone areas to choose alternate settlements, including returning to habitable houses, returning to plots near former houses, residing with host families, remaining in spontaneous settlements with engineering improvements, or moving to GoH-planned resettlement sites. International IDP guidelines include ensuring of safe access to food and potable water, basic shelter and housing, appropriate clothing and medical services and sanitation.³

With regards to the Emergency Supplemental for Haiti we ask Congress to:

- Endorse the active inclusion of Haitian civil society organizations and camp leadership in relocation, building and reconstruction efforts. Information must be collected from residents within camps, their spatial concerns must be addressed and their participation and leadership must be recognized. This should be complemented by working closely to strengthen the Government of Haiti.
- Prioritize sturdy and permanent hurricane-proof housing in existing communities as well as for those being re-located. One example of this model is The Fuller Center/Lazarian World Homes building which provides more space, privacy, security and permanence than tents, tarps or other temporary shelter structures.⁴
- Include a provision stating that any U.S. or U.S.-contracted re-location efforts fall under international human rights agreements (IDP guiding principles on relocation are currently not binding) and instruments, including UN international standards for relocation of internally displaced persons (IDPs).

¹ "Haiti: After the Earthquake" Initial Mission Findings March 2010

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AMR36/004/2010/en/d12e3cdc-2103-40b8-af57-1412dcf3d413/amr360042010en.pdf>

² "The Camp that Vanished" *IPS News* Ansel Herz March 9, 2010

<http://www.ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=50606>

³ OCHA Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement <http://www.unhcr.org/43ce1cff2.html>. While the Guiding Principles are non-binding, the 2005 UN World Summit unanimously approved the guidelines for the treatment of IDPs.

⁴ The Fuller Center (<http://www.fullercenter.org>) in collaboration with Lazarian World Homes (<http://www.lazarianworldhomes.com/haiti>) assemble homes (both single-and multi-family) for as low as \$3,000 USD.

- Create a recurrent reporting requirement for the U.S. State Department to disclose the state of human rights in Haiti based on access to basic goods, shelter and housing, education and employment and victims access to reporting and trial.
- Emphasize the importance of protection and security for internally displaced persons. We know that IDPs are at a greater risk for violence and access to basic resources becomes even more challenging. Marginalized groups including women, children, elderly and disabled people make up a disproportionate number of IDPs. The leadership of women must be incorporated in reconstruction and relocation processes.
- Encourage the Haitian government to incorporate the Guiding Principles on IDPs into national legislation as well as the Convention on the Rights of the Child⁵ and the Convention Against Torture. Recent reports from field workers associated with the Haiti Response Coalition identify current violations of international standards governing the treatment of internally displaced peoples (IDPs).
- Recognize the human rights of IDPs. Forced relocations directed by the Government of Haiti (GoH) that include violence and destruction of property are violations of long-recognized human rights. Swift action by the GOH to obtain land for IDP relocation efforts is needed and must include recognition of the rights of IDPs, utilization of laws of eminent domain and a guarantee that relocation efforts do not worsen the current situation.
- Affirm that earthquake response efforts should, to the extent possible, protect Haiti's poor by protecting the possessory and title rights to property that they enjoyed before the earthquake.
- Take immediate steps to ensure vulnerable Haitians receive dignified and safe shelter without delay to survive the current rains, and imminent hurricanes and mudslides. This can only be achieved by drastically streamlining normal procurement and distribution procedures.

We would be happy to provide your office with any additional information that may be helpful. We look forward to working with your office on this issue.

Regards,

American Jewish World Service
 Environmental Justice Initiative for Haiti
 Foreign Policy In Focus
 Gender Action
 Grassroots International
 Health Empowering Humanity (Haiti)
 Honor and Respect Foundation
 Institute for Justice & Democracy in Haiti
 International Action Ties (Haiti)
 Jesuit Refugee Service/USA
 Konbit Pou Ayiti (KONPAY) (Haiti)
 Lambi Fund
 Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office
 Partners in Health
 Quixote Center
 Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice & Human Rights
 TransAfrica Forum
 Unitarian Universalist Service Committee
 United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society
 Washington Office on Latin America

⁵ The U.S.' immediate ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is encouraged (<http://www.unicef.org/crc/>)