

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 12, 2010

The Honorable Rajiv Shah  
Administrator  
U.S. Agency for International Development  
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20523

Dear Administrator Shah,

We are writing to express our concern about the protection and safety of women and girls in Haiti following the devastation of the January 12, 2010 earthquake. While we recognize the tremendous list of needs in Haiti, we ask that you make the safety and wellbeing of women and girls a high priority throughout relief assistance efforts in Port-au-Prince and throughout the country.

Unfortunately, women and young girls throughout Haiti are increasingly vulnerable to gender-based violence. As you know, gender-based violence and rape were often used to intimidate and establish authority by the military de facto regime that controlled Haiti from October of 1991 to September of 1994. The lawlessness during this time period bred a cycle of violence against women within the Haitian culture that has been hard to eliminate. While Haiti struggled with gender-based violence and human trafficking issues prior to the earthquake, the ensuing lawlessness has increased vulnerability to and the occurrence of gender-based attacks. In addition, many of the programs and shelters established to halt such violence and exploitation were destroyed.

As Haiti focuses on rebuilding efforts, the United States, and other donor nations, should provide funding specifically for gender-based violence programs and services that will protect women and allow them to earn a living, increasing economic stability in Haiti. In many developing countries, including Haiti, women are often the primary income earners and caretakers of their families. Women living in a safe environment are better able to care for their families, properly feed and educate their children, and contribute to the local economy. The safety of women is important and their unique perspective should be consulted in efforts to combat trafficking and gender-based violence.

The protection of women and girls must be integrated throughout relief assistance efforts in Haiti. Among the immediate needs of food, shelter, cooking fuel and water, women need protection to be able to use latrines and bathe privately. Health services and secure places to report incidents of attacks and exploitation within these local communities are essential, as is access to comprehensive gender-based violence services that provide adequate referral information and address the health, safety and psychological needs of survivors.

Additionally, as the rebuilding process moves forward, a coordinated and comprehensive security plan should be created that prioritizes the safety of women and girls. The layouts of camps and settlements need to take safety concerns into account, including good lighting to minimize the risk of violence. Those who are charged with providing security should understand the particular needs of survivors of gender-based violence. Training on sexual exploitation, abuse, violence and human trafficking should be provided for the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) forces as well as the national police and local communities. Also, a zero tolerance policy for the sexual exploitation of women and girls should be established among MINUSTAH forces.

Without a doubt, the road to rebuilding Haiti will be challenging. We appreciate the work you and your counterparts have undertaken to provide assistance. We urge you to continue to work with President Rene Préval and other Haitian government officials to establish long-term services throughout Haiti that provide for the safety and wellbeing of women and girls as well as to ensure that women are included in gender-based violence programming decisions.

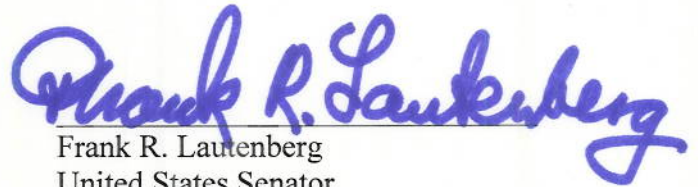
Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

cc: The Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton  
Secretary of State



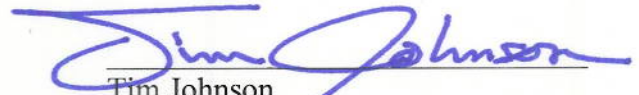
Mike Johanns  
United States Senator



Frank R. Lautenberg  
United States Senator



Sam Brownback  
United States Senator



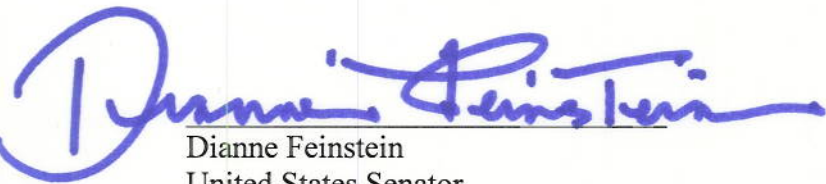
Tim Johnson  
United States Senator

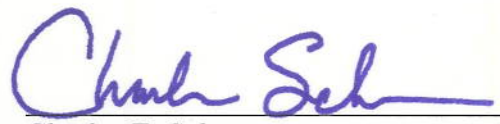


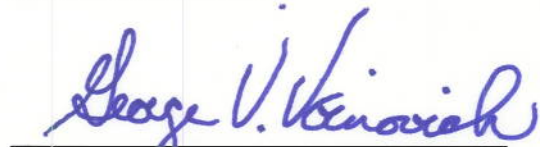
Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator




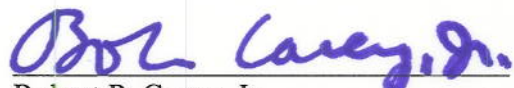
Olympia J. Snowe  
United States Senator


  
Dianne Feinstein  
United States Senator

  
Charles E. Schumer  
United States Senator

  
George V. Voinovich  
United States Senator

  
Benjamin L. Cardin  
United States Senator

  
Robert P. Casey, Jr.  
United States Senator

  
Kristen E. Gillibrand  
United States Senator