

Testimony of Loune Viaud

Director of Operations and Strategic Planning for Zanmi Lasante

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Chairwoman Lee, esteemed members of the Congressional Black Caucus, thank you for inviting me to testify here today. My name is Loune Viaud, and I am Director of Operations and Strategic Planning for Zanmi Lasante, an organization devoted to providing a preferential option for the poor in rural Haiti. Zanmi Lasante is the partner organization of Partners In Health, an organization which also advocates for and provides a preferential option for the poor around the world. On behalf of Zanmi Lasante and Partners In Health, I want to thank the members of the Congressional Black Caucus for arranging this hearing, and for ensuring that the voices of Haitians are heard. Today I will address the current situation and needs of the Haitian people, the needs of vulnerable children, the status of the healthcare system, and the need for decentralization and job creation.

The Current Situation and Haitian Priorities

On one visit to Port-au-Prince—even without venturing far from the airport—one will see that little progress has been made to date. I am going to talk about priorities—in any case, what we see as priorities on the ground. I see healthcare, employment, decentralization, protection of children, women, adolescent girls, the elderly and the most vulnerable members of the population. What happened to us the afternoon of January 12 changed everything. The way we live, the way we see the world and the future.

What happened to us is beyond words. So many people died. There are so many new people with disabilities, orphans, unaccompanied and displaced children, elders and women left vulnerable and at a loss. So much despair.

Despite this despair, we also feel grateful for the solidarity around the world. Immediately after the earthquake, a great number of people wanted to help, and many came to Haiti to do so. But now, six months later, we still need solidarity, and we need those who want to help to work in cooperation and partnership with and for the Haitian people. Rather than charity, Haiti needs partners. Haiti needs jobs. In particular, I see decentralization in the form of job creation outside of Port-au-Prince. Jobs will stabilize other parts of the country, empower the communities, and save lives.

We need Haitians to lead the reconstruction efforts. We need our partners to take a rights-based approach in the construction of a new Haiti. This means supporting the capacity and the leadership of both the Haitian government and Haitian communities; it means deferring to the experiences of Haitians and guaranteeing our participation in the rebuilding of our country; it means unconditionally respecting all of our human rights—including the right to food, the right to decent housing and sanitation, the right to health, the right to potable water, the right to education and the right to security.

Zanmi Beni and Protection of Vulnerable Children

We at Zanmi Lasante (ZL) are doing our best to protect the rights of some of the very most vulnerable members of our population: orphaned and abandoned children, many of whom are mentally and physically disabled. Child wellbeing has long been one of Zanmi Lasante's central concerns, as children are often the most vulnerable to sickness and deprivation of rights in the communities we serve. Following the earthquake, there was a desperate need for refuge and support for children affected by the quake.

In partnership with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Operation Blessing International, among other organizations, ZL is working to fill this gaping void. We opened Zanmi Beni, a home just outside of Port-au-Prince for abandoned and disabled children. Zanmi Beni, which means "blessed friends" in Haitian Creole, now provides shelter, education and love for over 48 children. We need more places like Zanmi Beni or at minimum, more children's shelters. In challenging times and impoverished settings, children are often the most at risk, in part because they are not as able to advocate for themselves.

Countrywide, the protection of children continues to be a priority as we work to improve the humanitarian situation in Haiti. Children were particularly affected by the earthquake: in the six months following the quake, of the almost 147,000 patient encounters logged at the clinics set up in the four settlement camps in Port-au-Prince, 40 percent were patients under age 20. Half of those patients were under five years old. Thousands more children were injured, traumatized, displaced, and orphaned by the earthquake. Children in Haiti, particularly homeless, disabled, and orphaned children, still desperately need shelter, care, and protection. We must make sure that their fundamental rights are protected, and that the government of Haiti is empowered to fulfill these rights.

The Health Sector

Together, the international community and people of Haiti must also work hard to ensure that the right to healthcare is being fulfilled for all. Strengthening of the healthcare system is essential to the restoration of Haiti.

On July 3, in partnership with local government, the Haitian Ministry of Health, Harvard, Duke, and Dartmouth Medical schools, and a variety of private and public organizations, Zanmi Lasante broke ground to begin building an innovative referral and teaching hospital. Mirebalais, where the hospital is being built, is about 35 miles north of Port-au-Prince, and is known as the "gateway" to the Central Plateau Department. The hospital perfectly embodies our commitment to Haiti in that it integrates research, teaching, and service, and is the result of a broad coalition of public, private, and government organizations, in both the U.S. and Haiti.



Loune Viaud with one of the children currently living at Zanmi Beni.

Prior to the quake, our plan was to build a 108-bed teaching hospital offering comprehensive, community-based primary and prenatal care as well as treatment for TB, HIV, malaria, and malnutrition. However, the destruction of 80 percent of Haiti's healthcare infrastructure on January 12 made the need for a hospital in Mirebalais more urgent than ever. Thousands of people have traveled to, and are still journeying into, the rural Central and Artibonite Departments from Port-au-Prince seeking desperately needed healthcare. Additionally, the earthquake badly damaged the country's only teaching hospital, and destroyed most of its educational facilities. The state medical and nursing schools were particularly hard hit, and the Port-au-Prince nursing school, where an entire class of nursing students died, was completely demolished. After the earthquake, at the request of Haiti's Ministry of Health, we expanded our vision for the hospital.

The new hospital will be 180,000 square feet and have 320 beds, in addition to state-of-the-art infection control, wall-mounted oxygen and medical gases, improved diagnostics (digital x-ray and ultrasound), and increased space around the beds to accommodate teaching rounds for medical and nursing students. The hospital will include the technological and logistical capacity to support educational exchanges, distance learning and remote collaborations. It is our hope that it will serve as a model for Haiti's national healthcare system, a place where Haitian doctors and nurses can be trained and empowered to take care of the country's people. In this way, it is our greatest hope that the Mirebalais hospital will strengthen healthcare throughout Haiti and help solve Haiti's healthcare human resource crisis.

We are employing local people to build the hospital that will serve them and their communities. This hospital will be our flagship, equivalent in capacity to all of our current facilities in Haiti. Perhaps more importantly, the Mirebalais hospital is a symbol: a symbol of our commitment to public partnerships and infrastructure, healthcare as a human right, and the people of Haiti. It is our commitment to "building back better," hand-in-hand with the government and people of Haiti.

Simultaneously, we are working to restore the devastated General Hospital in Port-au-Prince—l'Hôpital de l'Université d'Etat d'Haiti (HUEH), the largest medical institution in the country. The General Hospital was nearly destroyed by the earthquake, and in the days that followed, surviving staff members and volunteers—over 370 in total—worked to treat thousands of badly injured patients. Over the course of days and weeks, electricity and running water were restored. In addition, along with numerous partners, ZL was there and helped staff 12 operating rooms, where staff members and volunteers performed surgeries 24 hours a day.

More than six months after the earthquake, there is still much to be done, and ZL's focus is changing from the immediate to long-term strengthening and care. The hospital staff has resumed responsibility for most clinical services, and so we have shifted to increased training, capacity, and professionalization of the nursing staff. We have also worked to establish a Friends of HUEH Foundation to build partnerships and financial support for rebuilding and strengthening the hospital.

As with the Mirebalais Hospital, we are committed to cross-sector partnerships and long-term planning. We have found that the best way to ensure that access to these services is both

universal and sustainable is by partnering with Haitian public institutions that are ultimately responsible for ensuring that Haitians have the right to health, water, food, and education. These partnerships ensure that the capacity of the government is enhanced, and that the assets we are creating—crucial infrastructure and services—are ultimately owned by the Haitian people. Our partnerships have been successful because our goal is to support our government in doing its job – to fulfill all Haitians’ right to health.

Job Creation and Decentralization - Aquaculture Project

In addition to focusing on protection of children and on Haiti’s health sector, a main priority in improving the humanitarian situation in Haiti is the creation and decentralization of jobs. This is essential if Haiti is to stabilize and prosper, and to ensure that the human rights of Haiti’s people are fulfilled.

Haiti, like many countries, has historically seen in-country migration from its rural regions to Port-au-Prince, its capital city. Many moved to the city in search of employment opportunities. However, the January earthquake devastated Port-au-Prince, and set in motion a reversal of this trend. In the past six months, hundreds of thousands of people have moved to the Central Plateau and Lower Artibonite, areas where Zanmi Lasante has worked for over twenty years. Initially, most of these migrants were in need of immediate medical care—2,961 earthquake victims were treated at ZL health clinics in the first month after the quake. While many migrants continue to need healthcare, many moved in search of employment, stability, and survival. Decentralization of employment opportunities has become essential.

ZL and Partners In Health, in partnership with the UN Office of the Special Envoy to Haiti and the mayor of Boucan Carre, a region in the Central Plateau of Haiti, are working on a tilapia-raising aquaculture project. This project will bring jobs to hundreds in the region. It is again our hope that this project will also open up the region for development and investment on a larger scale.

In addition to the decentralization that is essential to Haiti’s recovery, the aquaculture project will help to fulfill other fundamental rights for people in the region. Currently, the region, two hours from Port-au-Prince, does not have access to fresh fish, a highly nutritious source of local food. The fish that is available is dried and is prohibitively expensive for most of the rural population. This project will both increase the amount of fish available, and at the same time decrease the cost to the rural population. In addition to providing food security, which is incredibly important, the aquaculture project will provide food sovereignty for a large segment of the population, enabling them to control food production for themselves and their community. In my humble opinion, we need more projects like this in the countryside of Haiti, especially where there are large rivers, which, instead of swelling during the rainy season and killing people in the region, they could be used to feed the communities.

I cannot emphasize enough the importance of food security and food sovereignty. Particularly for a marginalized and under-resourced population, food security and sovereignty will be transformative. Any industry, development, investment, and employment that this project brings to the area could similarly transform hundreds of thousands of lives. It is long-term development

projects and meaningful investments like this that we would like to focus on, in addition to dealing with more immediate needs.

Conclusion and Recommendations for Moving Forward

On all fronts, there is so much to be done.

I want to take this opportunity to express our gratitude to each and every one of you, venerable members of the Congressional Black Caucus, for all you have done for Haiti. Your work does not go unnoticed, and we are deeply appreciative. However, I am afraid that we still need you to do more.

Both the service and advocacy work will be long-term. Continued discussions and advocacy will be needed for bilateral and multilateral donors to encourage actual disbursement of the nearly US\$10 billion committed at the 2010 Donor Conference at the United Nations in March. Working with the Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice & Human Rights, the NYU Center for Human Rights and Global Justice, and the Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti, we proposed a rights-based framework for transparency and accountability to, international donors, implementers, and NGOs. Along with the UN Office of the Special Envoy and other partners, we will continue to advocate for better implementation of foreign aid-funded projects and to channel more aid through the Haitian government in order to strengthen their systems and their ability to fulfill their citizens' human rights.

We in Haiti appreciate the U.S. government's commitment to partnering with our government and our fellow Haitians as we rebuild. We hope that this commitment will come with the tools needed to facilitate our participation. Central to our meaningful participation are transparency mechanisms that will help Haitians across the country track U.S. government funds at the local level and be able to provide feedback on projects as they're being planned and implemented, and most importantly in the event that they do not have the desired outcome.

An immediate priority is the passage of the Supplemental War Funding Bill (H.R. 4899), which contains \$2.9 billion in aid to be released for Haiti's reconstruction. We need your help to protect the 425,000 or so families that are living in the internally displaced persons camps. These camps are crowded, ramshackle, unsanitary, and insecure - women and young girls are gang raped every night. The best possible solution is to build permanent housing to, among other things, decrease the gender-based violence, as well as create jobs and services. As the supplemental bill languishes, people are dying, and reconstruction is struggling. We need you to help us keep up the pressure to pass this bill.

We also need you to keep the attention on Haiti. Though the people of Haiti have long suffered at the hands of cruel dictators, brutally destructive international policies, and natural disasters; in the past, this suffering has often been ignored. However, immediately following the earthquake, the world's attention turned to Haiti. Our work has been assisted by the massive outpouring of support and solidarity from people around the world and from the contributions of donor countries. However, we need to maintain this focus. Two weeks ago, on July 12, we marked six months since the earthquake. Unfortunately, this was met with only passing attention by the U.S. media and populace. However, for those of us in Haiti, we are confronted by the effects of the

earthquake everywhere, every moment of every day. We are surrounded by evidence that there is so much more we can do to restore Haiti, and to fulfill the human rights of all in Haiti. Despite many challenges, there is much hope... I want to believe that with this administration, this Congress, those great friends of Haiti, there is hope and possibility for Haiti, if the right choices are made and the right actions are taken.

I don't expect miracles. I expect there will be many challenges ahead both political (i.e. the elections) and by natural disaster (hurricane season and the risk of more earthquakes). But I also expect your help, solidarity and partnership for the right choices and the right actions to be taken in favor of Haiti, venerable members of the CBC.

Mèsi anpil. Wout la long men avèk anpil men epi bòn volonte, chay la pa dwe lou...

Thank you very much.