



Institute for Justice & Democracy in Haiti
Fighting for the human rights of Haiti's poor

For Immediate Release:

November 2, 2010

Contact:

Alison Roh Park, **CCR**, apark@ccrjustice.org (212) 614-6480;
Nicole Phillips, **IJDH**, Nicole@ijdh.org (510) 715-2855;
Mario Joseph, **Bureau des Avocats Internationaux**, 011 (509) 3701 9879;
Kathleen Bergin, **You.Me.We.**, kbergin@ymwgloball.org (857) 222-6175;
Jennifer Goldsmith (jg5900a@student.american.edu) Laura Karr
(laura.p.karr@gmail.com), **Washington College of Law American University** (202)
274-4147

Rights Groups Testify Before Inter-American Commission and File Legal Request on Unlawful Forced Evictions in Haiti

November 2, 2010, Washington, D.C. — For the 1.5 million people still living in displacement camps, forced evictions pose an immediate threat of grave and irreparable harm, according to a coalition of human rights advocates who testified last week before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR). In response to unlawful forced evictions being carried out in displacement camps across Haiti, the **Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR)**, **Institute for Justice & Democracy in Haiti (IJDH)**, **Bureau des Avocats Internationaux**, the **International Human Rights Law Clinic at American University's Washington College of Law** and the disaster law center **You.Me.We.** filed a *Request for Precautionary Measures* with the IACHR today.

The legal request demands an immediate moratorium on forced evictions; an investigation into these violations; and the implementation of human rights monitoring mechanisms that will protect the rights of Haiti's most vulnerable population.

"Forced expulsions of the internally displaced violate Haitian and international law," said lawyer **Mario Joseph with Bureau des Avocats Internationaux**. "This is just the beginning of a problem we'll be facing for years to come unless the Haitian government immediately puts a moratorium on forced expulsions, verifies land ownership titles and nationalizes by decree all empty and idle lands in the hands of purported landowners."

The legal request, filed on behalf of five displacement camps, describes entire settlements that have been destroyed and the terrorization and brutality that camps' residents who refuse to vacate face routinely. According to a recent New York Times article, 28,000 displaced Haitians have been evicted and 144,000 people have been subject to threats of eviction. Most of the time, communities are left homeless again without any other place to go.

Said **Bill Quigley, CCR Legal Director**, "Haitians living in the IDP camps are already in desperate conditions. People are hanging on by a thread and should be put into safer situations with access to water, food and employment. Instead the exact opposite is happening; unbelievably, many people are being forced out of the camps and into even more precarious situations. The housing crisis in Haiti is deepening and worsening and action is required on many levels but, at the very least, forced evictions must end immediately."

Nicole Phillips, IJDH Staff Attorney and Assistant Director of Haiti Programs at the University of San Francisco School of Law said, "The Haitian government's response to the housing crisis has been to assist landowners in evicting families from displacement camps without providing any alternative place to live, further exacerbating security issues. These forced evictions must stop immediately and a comprehensive resettlement plan protecting Haiti's displaced population must be adopted."

Kathleen Bergin, law professor and You.Me.We. Director, added that the group has conducted two fact finding missions to Haiti, and their team of lawyers in Port au Prince continues to receive reports of on-going human rights violations. "Our investigation shows that government agents are forcing earthquake victims out of the camps with no place else to go, and that humanitarian aid, including food, water and medical care, are being withheld from camps targeted for eviction," says Bergin. "The police have bulldozed entire settlements, beaten and abused camp residents, and turned a blind-eye when thugs with machetes invaded the camps and assaulted the people inside."

According to **Laura Karr and Jennifer Goldsmith, Student Attorneys with the International Human Rights Law Clinic at American University's Washington College of Law**, "By conducting and permitting forced evictions, Haiti has committed serious human rights abuses against IDPs and put them at risk of irreparable harm. Haitian IDPs urgently need the Commission's protection from these human rights violations."

The groups hope that the hearing and legal request will prompt the Commission to take a leadership role in protecting the human rights of displaced Haitians.

For a copy of the filing, contact Nicole Phillips, IJDH at Nicole@ijdh.org or (510) 715-2855. An audio recording of the hearing is available at: <http://www.cidh.oas.org/prensa/publichearings/Hearings.aspx?Lang=En&Session=120>.

You.Me.We. is a disaster response law and policy center that defends human rights in the aftermath of sudden on-set disasters. One of the few human rights law organizations that focuses on disaster law, You.Me.We is engaged in domestic and international advocacy on behalf of displaced people across the globe, including New Orleans, Haiti, Turkey and Pakistan. In addition to housing rights advocacy following the earthquake in Haiti, the center has worked on issues relating to gender-based violence, voter disenfranchisement and free press violations that take place within the context of disaster.

The Center for Constitutional Rights is dedicated to advancing and protecting the rights guaranteed by the United States Constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Founded in 1966 by attorneys who represented civil rights movements in the South, CCR is a non-profit legal and educational organization committed to the creative use of law as a positive force for social change.

The Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti strives to work with the people of Haiti in their non-violent struggle for the consolidation of constitutional democracy, justice and human rights, by distributing objective and accurate information on human rights conditions in Haiti, pursuing legal cases, and cooperating with human rights and solidarity groups in Haiti and abroad.

The Bureau des Avocats Internationaux (BAI) in Port-au-Prince, has helped victims prosecute human rights cases, trained Haitian lawyers and spoken out on justice issues since 1995. The BAI used to receive most of its support from Haiti's constitutional governments, but since February 2004, it has received most of its support from the Institute for Justice & Democracy in Haiti (IJDH), and no support from any government or political organization.

The International Human Rights Law Clinic (IHRLC) offers student attorneys the opportunity to represent individuals, families or organizations alleging violations of recognized or developing human rights norms before international and domestic judicial bodies. Student attorneys also work on projects to influence U.S. law and policy on human rights issues.

###