



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Ten Years on from Haiti's Earthquake, Accountability and Self-Determination Hold Keys to Change

Jan 13, 2020 (Port-au-Prince and New York) - On the ten-year anniversary of Haiti's 2010 earthquake, we remember those whose lives were lost in the devastating tragedy.

Over the past ten years, the *Bureau des Avocats Internationaux* (BAI), a Haiti-based, human rights law firm, together with its partner, the U.S.-based Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti (IJDH), have advocated for a [rights-based approach](#) to earthquake reconstruction [grounded](#) in state capacity building, transparency, participation, and accountability. We've worked in grassroots solidarity to improve accountability, rule of law, and access to justice, including progress to strengthen the legal protection of women's rights through Haiti's courts, extending our model of community lawyering outside of the capital, building [civic engagement and legal empowerment](#) in rural communities, and spearheading advocacy and litigation on behalf of affected communities calling for cholera justice.

Ten years on, reconstruction remains challenged, however, by the very structural injustices that made the earthquake so damaging to begin with, have blocked progress towards long-term reconstruction, and continue to disadvantage the outlook for inclusive development in Haiti that centers the rights of its population.

The outpouring of international community support to Haiti in the aftermath of the earthquake was significant, but rebuilding efforts largely fell short of rights-based principles of accountability, rule of law, and international respect for self-determination. The challenges of reconstruction were compounded by international actors avoiding responsibility even when they directly caused more suffering. This has been most shockingly evidenced by the [unfulfilled promise by the United Nations \(UN\)](#) to take accountable action for introducing [cholera in Haiti](#)—after more than 6 years of refusing to acknowledge its role — and [clear evidence](#) of sexual exploitation and abuse of women and children by the very [UN peacekeepers](#) meant to serve and protect the population.

Less than [4% of the \\$7.5 billion disbursed by funders](#) since 2010 went to direct government budgetary support and less [than 2.3% to local organizations and companies](#). Haitian members of the Clinton-led Interim Haiti Reconstruction Commission (IHRC) [protested](#) their exclusion from the body's decision making, while hundreds of millions of dollars flowed into the Commission with [few long-term, positive results](#).

Haitian stakeholders were sidelined in designing reconstruction solutions, with efforts instead replicating exploitative and short-sighted dynamics that have fueled poverty and weakened state capacity and governance in Haiti over decades - reinforcing the very conditions that made the earthquake so devastating. Mario Joseph, Managing Director of BAI, comments, “lack of transparency and accountability in reconstruction fueled corruption at the expense of the people's rights and robbed Haiti of opportunities for development. Meanwhile, [international interference in elections](#) ensured that the Haitian Government was accountable to foreign powers not the people, and has directly [weakened democratic legitimacy](#).”

Today, the short-fallings of the promise to “Build Back Better” and prioritization of short-term stability over long-term, country-led solutions have left Haiti no less vulnerable to the disastrous consequences of a natural disaster than in 2010, and directly set the stage for Haiti's [current political and rule of law crisis](#).

On this year's anniversary we renew our call for accountability, respect for Haitian self-determination, and a commitment to more responsible engagement that centers human rights and rule of law, as rebuilding continues. When local leadership is valued, [progress is possible](#). ###