



Institute for
Justice &
Democracy
in Haiti (IJDH)



Bureau des
Avocats
Internationaux
(BAI)



Partners
In Health



ROBERT F. KENNEDY
CENTER FOR JUSTICE & HUMAN RIGHTS

Embargoed for Release

12:01 a.m., Tuesday, March 23, 2010

Contact:

Veerle Opgenhaffen, CHR&GJ
917-526-1972

Monika Kalra Varma, RFK Center
202-460-4681

Brian Concannon, IJDH
541-263-29

Donna Barry, PIH
617-669-7109

Mario Joseph, Bureau des Avocats Internationaux
786-972-2089

Rights Groups Testify about Haiti and Human Rights before Inter-American Commission

Testimony Details Haiti Aid Challenges, Presses for Commission Investigation

(Washington DC, March 23, 2010)—Members of the Organization of American States (OAS) should respect Haitians' human rights in their post-earthquake assistance to Haiti, said experts from several prominent organizations committed to respecting human rights and improving conditions in Haiti in their testimony before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights today. The groups—Bureau des Avocats Internationaux (BAI), the Center for Human Rights and Global Justice (CHR&GJ) at NYU School of Law, the Institute for Justice & Democracy in Haiti (IJDH), Partners In Health (PIH), the Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice and Human Rights (RFK Center), and Zanmi Lasante (ZL)—based their testimonies both on their recent investigations into conditions in Haiti following the earthquake and their prior experiences working on advancing respect for human rights and improving conditions there.

During the hearing, representatives of the groups made the following statements:

Mario Joseph, Bureaux des Avocats Internationaux:

“International aid has been given generously, but distributed poorly, without input from earthquake survivors. As a result, children are going hungry, women are at risk of sexual violence and exploitation, and families are sleeping in the rain, without waterproof shelter.”

Monika Kalra Varma, RFK Center:

“Rhetoric from international officials support rights-based principles such as transparency. However, unless Member States take specific steps to create accountability mechanisms—for example, by setting up a central website that tracks money pledged, project plans, and status updates—it will be nearly impossible for the Haitian government and impacted Haitian communities to follow the money trail.”

Loune Viaud, Zanmi Lasante/Partners In Health:

“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 which are ultimately responsible for ensuring that Haitians can access the right to health, water, food, and education.”

Meg Satterthwaite, CHRGI:

“Rebuilding Haiti without consideration for human rights is laying the groundwork for another disaster. This is a crucial opportunity to turn the tide and put Haitians, their needs and their rights, at the center of the agenda. This means transparency, attention to vulnerable and excluded groups, and building sustainable access to water and food.”

An independent human rights body of the OAS, the Inter-American Commission has a mandate to promote and protect human rights in the Western hemisphere. The groups urged that the Commission focus attention on how international assistance is impacting the human rights situation in Haiti and to ensure that assistance respects Haitians’ human rights. The Commission was specifically requested to undertake a visit to Haiti to investigate the human rights situation, and delivery of assistance and to issue a statement setting out how OAS Member States can fulfill their obligation to respect human rights as they provide assistance to Haiti.

To read the brief, testimonies, and supporting documents, submitted to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights in support of the hearing, please click [HERE](#).

To watch the hearing live, please click [HERE](#).

Today’s hearing preceded the much-anticipated March 31st Haiti Donors’ Conference at the United Nations headquarters in New York, where future aid to Haiti will be discussed at length. The groups recently issued a list of concrete [recommendations](#) outlining a rights-based approach to aid delivery in advance of that conference. They also galvanized the support of more than 300 NGOs worldwide, who signed on to a [letter](#) sent to donor states on March 17th, emphasizing the need for a rights-based approach to drive all future aid to Haiti. The groups have a long history of working on aid and human rights issues in Haiti.

For more information about these organizations, please visit their websites: www.chrgj.org, www.pih.org, <http://ijdh.org>, www.rfkcenter.org