

HAITI ADVOCACY WORKING GROUP (HAWG)

HAWG is a working group of international development, faith-based, human rights and social justice organizations advocating on issues related to U.S.-Haiti policy.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN HAITI

Epidemic of Rapes Against Women and Girls in Haiti's IDP Camps

In the wake of the January 12, 2010 earthquake in Haiti, women and girls living in the internally displaced persons (IDP) camps face alarming rates of rape and other sexual violence. Inadequate security and lack of privacy in the IDP camps leave women vulnerable to sexual assault and the associated risks of disease transmission and psychological trauma. In the two months following the earthquake, one grassroots women's group tracked 230 rapes in just 15 of the hundreds of IDP camps in Port-au-Prince. The Haitian government has been able to begin prosecutions of only a fraction of these cases. At least half of the victims are Haitian girls under the age of eighteen and medical services are overwhelmed and unable to meet women's healthcare needs stemming from the assaults—many women suffer from depression and are at risk for suicide.

Why Haitian Women's Participation is Critical

Women's full participation and leadership in all phases of the reconstruction of Haiti, as mandated by UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and other internationally recognized standards, requires that a gender perspective be integrated into ongoing discussions and planning. Such a human rights-based approach is mandated by international law and crucial to rebuilding Haiti on a more sustainable, equitable and disaster-resilient foundation.

Recommendations

We applaud the actions of donor States to assist the people of Haiti in this time of crisis and respectfully remind donor governments of their obligation to ensure that vulnerable women and girls are provided adequate protection from sexual violence. The UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement call on governments to consult with Haitian women and ensure their participation in decisions that impact their lives. Effective consultations enable participants to actually influence outcomes and are anchored in formal partnerships with Haitian women's groups (particularly local grassroots groups), who are empowered and resourced to take public leadership in the process of reconstruction.

We respectfully urge members of the US Congress to urge USAID to:

1. Guarantee Haitian women's full participation and leadership in all phases of the reconstruction of Haiti as mandated by UN Security Council Resolution 1325, the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and other internationally recognized standards;

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Multiple organizations contribute on a case by case basis to issue or sector specific recommendations and positions expressed in HAWG materials. These materials are not designed to be consensus positions and have not been explicitly endorsed by each organization active in the HAWG.

2. Prioritize the safety and wellbeing of women and girls throughout the relief assistance efforts in Haiti by prioritizing increased security and lighting in the camps, supporting community-based anti-violence programs by providing salaries for informal patrols and supplying basic resources, such as flashlights, walkie-talkies and whistles, and developing and implementing a plan for more permanent housing with the Haitian Government;
3. Prioritize the training of officers in how to effectively respond to rape and other gender-based offenses, and deploy more female officers to handle cases involving violence against women;
4. Work with the Haitian Government to enact a systematic collection of data that documents the prevalence and incidences of all forms of violence against women in the IDP camps; in collaboration with civil society organizations; and
5. Urge the Government of Haiti to assess its current laws, policies and programs that address violence against women; evaluate their compliance with international obligations; remove discriminatory laws and practices against women; and implement a legal and policy framework that guarantees due diligence and promotes the full protection and promotion of women's human rights, including prevention, investigation, sanction and reparation.

This document is taken from a lengthier report by the Institute for Justice & Democracy in Haiti (IJDH), MADRE and others from the Lawyers' Earthquake Response Network (LERN) entitled "Our Bodies Are Still Shaking: Haitian Women's Fight Against Rape" released July 2010 which can be accessed at <http://ijdh.org/archives/13361>.

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