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Mario Joseph, Av., Managing Attorney, Bureau des Avocats Internationaux (BAI), Mario@ijdh.org, 011+ 509-3701-9879 (Haiti – speaks French and Haitian Creole)
Nicole Phillips, Esq., Staff Attorney, Institute for Justice & Democracy in Haiti (IJDH), Nicole@ijdh.org, 510-715-2855 (U.S. – speaks English and French)

Inter-American Commission on Human Rights tells Haitian government to prevent excessive force and violence in evictions from earthquake displacement camp

(Port-au-Prince, March 26, 2013)— Today, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights granted precautionary measures to residents of Grace Village, one of approximately 450 earthquake displacement camps in Haiti. The Commission advised the Government of Haiti to immediately take steps to prevent any violent evictions and provide clean water and security to camp residents, especially women and children.

Human rights lawyer Mario Joseph of the Bureau des Avocats Internationaux (BAI), who, along with Défenseurs des Opprimés (Defenders of the Oppressed) and the Institute for Justice & Democracy in Haiti (IJDH) filed the claim with the Commission, calls the precautionary measures a significant victory and says the Haitian government “should not be sending police to support unlawful and violent evictions like in Grace Village. The government must require land owners to follow proper legal eviction procedures and give residents adequate notice and legal recourse to defend their rights.”

Earlier this month, Amnesty International called for urgent action against the “constant campaign of intimidation against camp residents” at Grace Village by the alleged owner of the land. Grace Village authorities blocked humanitarian organizations from providing aid to residents, obtained arrest warrants against camp residents trying to protect their rights, and instructed private security to throw rocks at residents at night. As a result, camp residents live in inhumane conditions with little to no access to food, shelter or clean water, and are under constant fear of violent evictions. This is in direct contrast to claims by Grace International, Inc., which collects donations to manage the camp, that it runs a “model” camp that provides well water, showers, toilets and garbage disposal.

Unfortunately Grace Village is just one of hundreds of camps being threatened with unlawful eviction. Earlier this month the United Nations expressed “grave concern of the humanitarian community in Haiti regarding the recent incidents of forced evictions of internally displaced persons (IDPs) from camps in Port-au-Prince.” The UN estimates that 20 percent of the 350,000 Haitian still living in earthquake displacement camps will face eviction in 2013.

Nicole Phillips, Staff Attorney with IJDH says the Commission’s recommendations “reconfirm that forced evictions from displacement camps not only add trauma to earthquake victims, but also violate Haitian and international human rights standards.” Phillips says she is sympathetic to landowners still hosting displacement camps three years after the earthquake, but says “landowners should raise their concerns with the Haitian government and international community who have not provided adequate housing to earthquake victims, rather than waging violence against displaced communities desperate to find a safe home.”

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