

Testimony by

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“The Crisis in Haiti: Are We Moving Fast Enough?”

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- I. Thank you Chairman Engel (NY) and Ranking Member Mack (FL) for calling this very important hearing and giving Catholic Relief Services an opportunity to testify before this committee. My name is Nicole Balliette and I am the CRS’ Deputy Director, Haiti Earthquake Emergency Response. With the committee’s permission, I would like to enter my full written testimony for the record and I will summarize it orally. At this time, I would like to thank the members of this committee for the passage of the Haiti Economic Lift Program Act of 2010 (H.R. 5160), the Haiti Debt Relief and Earthquake Recovery Act of 2010 (H.R. 4573), and for swift passage of the Haiti supplemental. CRS would also like to thank Mr. Conyers (MI) for introducing the HEAR Act which would provide \$3 billion over five years to aid in the recovery and rebuilding process.

I would also like to take this opportunity to express our appreciation for the generous financial and technical assistance provided by the US government to CRS and other actors in Haiti, which has been fundamental to what has been accomplished. Included in this is the positive service of US military personnel, who in the early days of the response provided the security necessary to allow for immediate and life-saving humanitarian interventions.

We have passed the six-month mark, and I know this Committee and the world are concerned about Haiti and the recovery and reconstruction process. CRS shares those concerns, but believes that despite the immense challenges, with effective leadership from the Haiti Government, widespread participation from civil society, and strong support from the US and other governments and agencies, we can overcome those challenges and achieve the sustainable and just recovery that the Haitian people deserve.

But are we moving fast enough toward that goal? NO! It’s never fast enough when people are without shelter, security, livelihoods. We have accomplished a lot, but there are still many challenges that need to be overcome, and it will not be easy.

II. Background:

Pre-Earthquake, Haiti already had the highest poverty levels in the Western Hemisphere, as well as underdeveloped systems and structures needed for just and sustainable development. A comparison with the recent earthquake in Chile illustrates how these underlying factors, more than the earthquake itself, caused the devastation with which the people of Haiti are currently struggling.

CRS has been working together with the people of Haiti for over 55 years, in the areas of health, water and sanitation, agriculture and food security, livelihood security, protection, and education. Prior to the earthquake, we had just over 300 staff in Haiti, including a handful of international staff (we have now expanded to more than 500 staff including around 30 international staff). Over the years, CRS has provided immediate relief when needed, and, through our development programs, has helped the people of Haiti learn the skills and access the tools they need to lift themselves out of dire poverty.

The trauma caused by the earthquake necessitates that we strengthen both our own commitment of solidarity, and the relationships that we have with the Haitian people. For the recovery process to succeed, we need to help people heal as well as recover, and we need to help them fully exercise their individual and collective power to affect a wider and deeper process of constructive social change.

III. Positive aspects of CRS' earthquake response in Haiti

Within hours of the disaster, our Haitian and international staff began responding. Our generous donors began immediately contributing what has become an unprecedented amount. CRS has to date spent over \$30 million and has made major strides in meeting desperate needs, including:

- Provided food to nearly 900,000 people. Currently providing food to more than 100,000 children in over 270 schools and 100 orphanages and child-care centers in Port-au-Prince and Les Cayes.
- Provided emergency shelter materials to more than 114,000 people.
- CRS health care teams performed over 960 emergency operations and conducted 62,000 outpatient consultations.
- Supported hundreds of thousands of people with food, water, sanitation, shelter materials and protection activities, including at two of the largest camps for the displaced. Established five "child-friendly spaces" for unaccompanied children at camps, regularly attended by more than 1,500 children.
- Initiated family tracing and reunification activities in targeted areas in Haiti, including the northeast border area, where we also work with partners on a sexual and gender-based violence referral network and a safe house for survivors of such violence.
- Installed over 600 latrines and hand-washing stations, as well as potable water tanks and inflatable water bladders in Port-au-Prince and environs, providing an estimated 375,000 gallons of water per month.
- Worked with our Caritas Haiti partners from the local Church to update contingency plans and preposition relief items in anticipation of the hurricane season.

- Provided assistance to numerous local and international partners in Haiti.

Thanks to the generosity of public donors and charitable individuals, CRS continues to expand our programming to ensure that life saving and enhancing services are benefitting the largest possible number of vulnerable people in an accountable and transparent way. To make that happen, we are working with the government of Haiti, UN and other international agencies (including through the cluster system), the Church in Haiti and other civil society actors, to ensure a coordinated and effective response. If we do our job right, the Haitian people will gradually become less dependent on external assistance, and better able to independently withstand future disasters. CRS' goal is for Haitians to live dynamic, productive, and dignified lives, and we believe that we must now lay the groundwork for accomplishing that goal.

IV. Constraints and Recommendations

1. The Government of Haiti must play the leadership role in the country's recovery, but the success of the process will depend in large part on the actions of a robust civil society that defends, promotes and responds to the interests and needs of poor and marginalized Haitians, and monitors transparency and accountability on the part of their government. Strong and effective leadership by Haitians must be encouraged and facilitated, so all actors involved in the rebuilding of Haiti help strengthen the capacity of civil society and government agencies. The hardware of infrastructure development alone cannot lead to thriving communities. Such reconstruction and infrastructural development will only be successful if strong leaders and effective institutions, systems and structures are in place across society (education, health care, public transportation, government, economy, markets, banks, etc).

CRS will continue to work closely together with the government of Haiti, the Church in Haiti, Haitian civil society and other international and local actors to help ensure not only that the right things are done, but also that they are done in the right way. We understand that strong relationships, mutual respect and an understanding of the context and the different capacities we all have are the basis of good and sustainable development.

2. Security is a huge constraint on the ability of actors to provide services to vulnerable people. In the few areas designated as transitional camps, it is extremely difficult to provide the necessary services because new families continue to pour into the camps, causing them to be overcrowded and insecure. Only a few years ago improved security in Haiti was a great success story---could this not be replicated in a way that will allow vulnerable people to protect themselves and their families, and at the same time allow humanitarian actors to provide the services those people need, including the installation of transitional shelters?

If the most vulnerable members of Haitian society are to have a voice in the recovery process, they need to be both protected and empowered. Women, children, the elderly and the disabled are especially vulnerable when displaced from their homes. If they cannot keep themselves and their families safe, they cannot contribute to ensuring that the recovery process is both successful and just. This means protecting women and children from trafficking, sexual- and gender-based violence and all other forms of abuse and exploitation.

3. Resettlement Strategy: The lack of an overall resettlement strategy seriously constrains the work of all the actors in Haiti. Current efforts seem to be *ad hoc*, camp by camp, etc. The Haitian government must develop a holistic resettlement strategy that all relief and development partners can use to guide their efforts, so that more and more Haitian people can return to something resembling normal life.
4. Transitional Shelters: A specific and high-priority problem linked to the prior point is that although many of the actors in Haiti have the materials and are ready to construct tens of thousands of transitional shelters, we don't have enough places to install them. Space for transitional shelters is an urgent need that requires the highest possible prioritization. Two of the primary solutions to this problem are:
 - Remove the rubble and debris more quickly so people can have their houses repaired or can erect transitional shelter on their home sites, or the home sites of their families or friends. Our preference is for families to be provided with shelter on home sites, where they can tap into their traditional support networks and capitalize on their familiar coping strategies, which is more difficult if they are living in settlements in unfamiliar areas.
 - Allocate and secure land so that transitional shelters and other services can be provided for those people who are unable to move to home sites.

These solutions require the leadership of the Government of Haiti, the collaboration of the Church and civil society, and the support and assistance of others, including the US government. Until these solutions are implemented, too many Haitians will continue to suffer with the overcrowded, insecure and inadequate conditions in the emergency settlements.

V. Conclusion

Civil society actors including the Catholic Church, which has a significant communal and institutional presence in Haiti, must play a prominent role in promoting, advocating for, monitoring and evaluating strategies and plans. An effective communication and participation process that includes civil society should be established. The Church is an important actor in the recovery process, particularly spiritually, but also in the health and education fields, providing hundreds of thousands with critical social services. The recovery effort must include better efforts to tap these and other significant actors in Haiti's civil society and engage them to be partners with the government of Haiti in the planning and implementation of the country's recovery.

The Haiti earthquake response is large-scale and complex. It requires dedicated, organized and cooperative efforts, with Haitians leading the way. But we can't let the complexity prevent us from achieving immediate results, while we also lay the groundwork for long-term development. We need to strike a balance. In addition, we need to continue to have active engagement by international actors to ensure that Haitian leadership and society are able to transition from business as usual and use the opportunity to "build back better".