



Joint statement on behalf of Caritas Internationalis, International Catholic Child Bureau, Dominicans for Justice and Peace [Order of Preachers], Franciscans International, Istituto Internazionale Maria Ausiliatrice, VIDES International, Teresian Association, and OIDEL¹

At Thirteenth Special Session of the Human Rights Council: Special Session “The Support of the Human Rights Council to the Recovery Process in Haiti after the Earthquake of January 12, 2010: A Human Rights Approach”

As Catholic Church-inspired organizations deeply engaged in humanitarian assistance, development, and defence of human rights programmes in Haiti long before the most recent catastrophe, we express our gratitude to this august Council for its wise attention to the human rights implications of the current emergency. The impact of this disaster is felt most directly by the victims themselves. It also has resulted in an exponential deterioration of structures necessary to deliver effective and efficient aid and to assure enjoyment of human rights by the Haitian people who have suffered injustice, want, and marginalisation for too long a period of time. In this regard, we appeal to this Council to call for a balance between emergency action and a long-term development perspective in response to the crying needs of the Haitian people.

The immediate dimensions of this crisis already have been communicated widely within the international community and to the general public, even if total consequences are yet uncalculated. Thus, we will focus on the human rights concerns that our organizations have seen firsthand in the course of our immediate and widespread emergency relief efforts. These efforts continue to suffer from severe lack of resources and

¹ The Fondazione Marista per la Solidarietà Internazionale and Centro Poveda align themselves to this statement.

of coordination.² These initiatives are supplementary to the efforts of local persons, many of whom are motivated by faith-related values of solidarity, concern for the most vulnerable, and commitment to the common good to share what little food, water, and shelter they have with those less fortunate than themselves. Thus we acknowledge that most effective humanitarian response, that also is respectful of basic human rights, must be located in families and local communities.

We wish to raise a special appeal to prioritize the immediate survival and protection needs of women and children. Both the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the Committee on the Rights of the Child have called attention to the striking vulnerability of these populations even before the present disaster occurred. Thus we call on the Human Rights Council to urge development, by the international community, of special action plans to ensure adequate access to and provision of nutrition, water, shelter, health care and protection against violence for both women and children. We also appeal for attention to emotional as well as physical needs of children in order to promote their future development and resilience. In this regard, education must be included among the first lines of response, especially for children who are separated from their families, so that they can regain a sense of “normalcy” and thus benefit from safe and secure spaces where they can interact positively with caregivers and with each other.

A particular challenge to delivery of immediate aid has been the lack of coordination evident in many sectors of humanitarian response. In a country with little infrastructure or rule of law, the international community must take measures to guarantee basic protection, especially for those who are most vulnerable. Our organizations insist that self-serving actions by countries and organizations engaged in relief efforts must be prevented.³

As organizations that will remain on the ground in Haiti long after other international organizations have left, we also wish to raise deep concerns about the possibility of envisioning and implementing long-term development strategies and action in this long-suffering country. As was pointed out by Caritas Internationalis President, Cardinal Oscar Rodriguez Maradiaga, “We have long warned that the lack of development in Haiti, its dire poverty, and its decaying infrastructure leaves it vulnerable to disasters.”⁴ We believe that the time has come for the international community, with strong urging from this distinguished Council, to mobilise

² A most recent report on the situation from the Caritas Internationalis team on site in Haiti, with participation from local Caritas Haiti workers as well as specialists from 16 additional countries indicated: “Food assistance does not meet the demand in the neighbourhoods and camps. There is high demand for medical care, but a limited number of specialists and medicines, and minimal facilities for operations. There is a need for more water and for removal of rubble and waste, and roofing and shelter are in short supply.” (Caritas official: Agencies must gear up to help Haitians in long term, by Barbara J. Fraser, Catholic News Service, 25 January 2010.)

³ Military contingents mandated through unilateral decisions taken by individual countries may not represent the most balanced or efficient responses to such crisis situations. A more vigorous response by the international community, through joint action taken in the context of the United Nations system, should be considered. Another important contribution to emergency response planning and action may be sought from regional structure of CARICOM and the Caribbean countries that constitute themselves as geographical neighbours to Haiti.

⁴ <http://blog.caritas.org/2010/01/14/caritas-president-calls-for-international-support-to-haiti/>

“lasting solutions and commitment to alleviate the misery of Haitians and the infrastructural poverty of this beleaguered nation.⁵” In accord with the Catholic Social Teaching principle of subsidiarity, we believe that such solutions cannot be developed without the direct participation and leadership of the Haitian people.

Key to such a long-term development strategy will be strengthening of health, education, agricultural, and overall economic infrastructure in the country. Caution must be taken against aid approaches that will cause further dependency among the Haitian people. For example, Haiti can produce its own rice, beans, and corn that can save the lives of its own children! Equally crucial is the development of a truly democratic system that allows free expression of opinion and the rule of justice and law based on the common good for all Haitian people. A careful balance between assistance and development efforts concentrated in the capital and those undertaken in other parts of the country could facilitate a solution to situations of over-crowding in Port-au-Prince as well as further development of trade and industry on a more equitable basis throughout this nation.

We believe that Mme. Claudette Werleigh, former Prime Minister of Haiti, and present Secretary General of Pax Christi International has aptly described this goal as follows: “Haiti and its institutions must be strong enough to be prepared for the next tragedy that may hit the country. It is not every time that we can rely on international help.”⁶

In conclusion, we recommend that the Human Rights Council request all relevant mandate holders and Special Rapporteurs (the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on the human rights of internally displaced persons, the Special Rapporteur on the right to food, the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing, the Special Rapporteur on the right to health, the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, the Independent Expert on access to safe drinking water and sanitation, and the Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in Haiti) to urgently carry out a joint mission to investigate the violations of human rights in Haiti and to submit their report to the 14th session of Human Rights Council in June 2010.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ “The only way to help is to have the Haitian people themselves involved in the rescue operation,” The Tablet, 23 January 2010.