

Security Council "Arria Formula" Meeting on Haiti
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I. Introduction

Thank you, your Excellency, and the Permanent Mission of Argentina to the United Nations, for chairing this meeting. Thank you also to the other distinguished delegations for attending this meeting as you prepare to leave next week for Haiti.

I speak representing World Vision and specifically our office in Haiti. My World Vision colleagues in Haiti are Haitians themselves, who are not only working tirelessly to meet the humanitarian needs of Haiti's most vulnerable, but are living in this crisis. Their passionate cry to you today is to act urgently and decisively to protect civilians in partnership with Haitian counterparts and rebuild hope.

II. Background

World Vision began working in Haiti in 1978 and currently operates in 5 departments, Center, South, West, North and Northwest addressing the chronic survival needs of more than a million Haitian citizens.

Ongoing program assistance is provided through private and public funding raised through our World Vision partners in Canada, United States, Australia, New Zealand, and Japan. Many of our funds are from private citizens around the world interested and concerned for the lives of Haitians.

World Vision/Haiti responds to the long terms needs caused by the chronic crisis of poverty. In collaboration with the community, we offer both school rehabilitation and educational programs to help keep children in school, we address maternal and child health needs and income needs through micro-credit to the most vulnerable, especially women. Haiti known to have the highest rate of children under 15 being orphaned by AIDS, we are working in consortium with other NGOS to provide a seamless system of health delivery to those affected.

We are providing watershed management and water filtration systems on the island of La Gonave and the Central Plateau and agricultural assistance to small farmers. We commit to a community for a minimum of 15 years supporting their community development efforts.

World Vision also responds to rapid on-set crises. As Regional Director for Humanitarian and Emergency Assistance in the Americas, I have supported WV/Haiti in their response activities on no less than 3 emergencies just last year: The political crisis in February, the flooding in Mapou and the flooding in Gonaives in September. And it is important to remember that the 2005 hurricane season is once more upon us in approximately 7 weeks.

With funding through USAID, WVH is currently feeding approximately 70,000 persons in the Central Plateau and 35,000 people on the Island of La Gonave. In the last 3 years, WVH responded to two failed harvests with 126 MT of seeds and four months of harvest protection rations for 6,000 farmer families (30,000 people). Given the drought currently impacting the country WVH may again have to respond to another failed harvest.

III. The “Silent Emergency”

World Vision Haiti wishes to draw your attention to the fact that the humanitarian and socio-economic disasters Haiti is dealing with today are the result of failed political processes

In 2003 UNDP characterized the period following the failed 2001 election as Haiti’s “silent emergency”. The political crisis triggered the withdrawal of international aid weakening an already fragile governance structure and exacerbating conditions of chronic poverty. This “silent emergency” serves as a demonstration of the regular and destructive interplay between political instability, increasing physical insecurity and the chronic livelihood insecurity that World Vision seeks to mitigate year after year.

Today the nature of the violence is changing. Until recently sexual and gender-based violence was considered an urban phenomenon, but is now becoming more commonplace in rural areas, unheard of only a few short years ago. The incidence of rape is being seen as a proxy for indicating the extent of social deterioration taking place in the society.

Given the level of physical insecurity plaguing Haiti today the possibility of another failed election looms large unless certain steps are taken soon to address the erosion in the relationships between the international peacekeeping operation in Haiti and the local Haitian institutions expected to lead Haiti once the international operation departs.

IV. Recommendations

A political crisis can be averted if MINUSTAH commits fully to exercising its mandate of ensuring and securing a stable environment, supporting a constitutional and political process and in monitoring, promoting and protecting human rights

Our WV-Haiti Director, Mr. Wesley Charles, traveled to Brazil last month, and in collaboration with the head of WV/Brazil, met with Brazilian officials to advocate for a greater effort on the part of Brazilian-led MINUSTAH to understand the complexities and nuances of the Haitian situation. We believe, that in part, the crisis impacting MINUSTAH in its efforts to fulfill its mandate is partially due to a lack of understanding of the Haiti context.

For MINUSTAH to succeed in fulfilling its tripartite mandate of stabilization, security and human rights, World Vision encourages the Peacekeeping forces to:

1. Expand its protection responsibility under the stabilization part of MINUSTAH's mandate and take steps to distinguish and separate civilian and military reconstruction tasks.

A. The most sustainable solution to achieving security is through the generation of jobs and legitimate economic opportunities. World Vision encourages a greater investment in public works projects both to reconstruct and to provide employment.

Large infrastructure projects, especially road building, can be addressed by MINUSTAH troops. Grassroots community assistance activities - re-equipping or upgrading schools, local health centers for instance - are best addressed by humanitarian agencies operating independently of MINUSTAH while under the security umbrella.

This delicate balance of civilian and military aspects of the reconstruction process is critical for reducing violence and empowering local communities.

B. Stabilization also means building the capacity of local security forces to manage the country's security with an emphasis on protecting civilians. Five successive UN missions have failed in this task, but MINUSTAH cannot afford this option. The capacity gap between the resources, tools and infrastructure of MINUSTAH and those of the Haitian National Police create an atmosphere of inequity and frustration. Working alongside the Haitian National Police and building their capacity to protect the rights of civilians is critical.

2. Disarmament, Demobilisation and Re-integration

MINUSTAH needs to make a more visible and vigorous commitment to take small arms out of circulation and de-mobilise armed elements. This should include support to the local government to reform the National Police whose linkages with some armed gangs are often reported. Of particular importance are DDR programs that focus on the large number of unemployed youth who have few prospects apart from gang membership. The UN needs to bring its ample experience in DDR programs elsewhere and build government capacity to carry this out.

3. Public Information and Outreach

Widespread public confusion in Haiti about the UN's purpose and goals in Haiti have further contributed to destabilization. MINUSTAH should invest in clearer and more systematic public information and communication. NGOs have often remarked at how UN missions can sometimes be perceived as aloof or arrogant by the local population. In this instance a stronger commitment by peacekeepers and UN personnel to language learning and cultural immersion will go a long way to restoring community confidence in the UN's mission, and reduce conflict and misunderstanding.

4. Support for an inclusive Political Process.

Engaging all political parties - even those that others may have once considered with destructive or less than transparent aims - is critical to the success of a sustained peace process. MINUSTAH's political mission should aim at forming a "Coalition of (even) the Unwilling" as it were, to engage spoilers. This process should also seek ways to include civil society groups as means to hold all parties accountable to their commitment to peace and reconstruction.

Finally, Resolution 1576 adopted by the UN Security Council encourages the Transitional government to continue to develop proposals for concrete economic development strategies in close cooperation with the international community.

World Vision recommends that the Security Council also urge its member states to explore amongst themselves economic investment strategies, such as preferential trade treatment agreements (eg. the Hero Act once considered by the US. congress) that can contribute to a more sustainable economic recovery and development of the Haitian economy.

As the Security Council prepares for its visit to Haiti next week, World Vision encourages the delegation to include in its site visits, travel to the rural areas and discussions with NGOs in Haiti. World Vision would be please to participate or play host while you are in country.

At the end of the day we are not military experts or politicians. We are a Christian humanitarian agency concerned about justice for the poor and vulnerable people of Haiti. We believe that our experience can inform and hopefully influence decisions that will help lead to lives transformed.