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HAITI: FROM THE GROUND UP

The devastating earthquake that struck Port-Au-Prince in January radically altered the lives of the Haitian people, as well as the international community's engagement with the country. Billions of dollars in government and private donations have been provided from around the world. However, millions of Haitians are still desperate for food, water, shelter and protection from abuse and exploitation. Moving forward, the U.S. and UN must quickly improve its efforts for displaced Haitians by connecting with Haitian civil society groups and streamlining bureaucratic processes. The U.S. must also ensure that government-assistance programs for Haiti are not funded at the expense of other international humanitarian emergencies.

THE TASK: REBUILDING AN ENTIRE COUNTRY

The earthquake in Haiti may have killed upwards of 230,000 and displaced some 1.2 million people. It has radically altered the lives of millions of Haitians, as well as the international community's engagement with the country. The scale of the disaster and the logistical complexities of responding to an emergency in a devastated urban area have been overwhelming. The capacity of both the Haitian government and the United Nations to respond was also severely affected by the large-scale loss of life within their own institutions. It is essential to take stock of how the international humanitarian system performed under this strain. Despite the impressive collective efforts of Haitian citizens and organizations and individuals around the world, the humanitarian response has fallen short of meeting the Haitian people's immediate needs for food, water, shelter and protection from abuse.

MISSING LINKS: THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY AND CIVIL SOCIETY

The first step to improving humanitarian programs in Haiti is for the UN and international agencies to link into Haiti's civil society network. There is a strong, organized

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- The U.S. and UN must urgently connect and coordinate their humanitarian, reconstruction and development initiatives with Haitian civil society groups. UN agencies should create liaison positions to these groups.
- The current UN Deputy Humanitarian Coordinator in Haiti should be mandated to lead the Humanitarian Country Team.
- The UN Refugee Agency should lead the protection cluster in future large-scale natural disasters.
- The U.S. Congress should fund USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) at no less than \$1.06 billion in FY2011 through the International Disaster Assistance account and should replenish OFDA funding within the supplemental appropriations bill at no less than \$400 million.

civil society comprised of grassroots community-based organizations under umbrella networks, as well as larger, established development non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Developing relationships with Haitian leadership will increase community acceptance of humanitarian, recovery and development programs and ensure that response and recovery strategies incorporate local knowledge and recommendations. Some of the initial problems in distribution could have been avoided had there been a greater emphasis on community outreach, in particular for distributions of basic supplies.

Currently, coordination and communication between Haitian civil society and UN and international NGOs are largely missing, with both sectors operating along parallel and separate lines. Local organizations have a hard time accessing meetings at the UN compound in Port-au-Prince, where UN agencies and international NGOs have established task-specific cluster groups to improve communication across operating agencies, discuss specific needs, and coordinate activities in order to avoid overlap and maximize outreach and coverage of a response. Haitian groups are either unaware of the meetings, do not have proper photo-ID passes for entry, or do not have the staff capacity to spend long hours at the compound.

It is imperative that in the next month UN and INGO staff invest time and resources into building working relationships with civil society organizations. The UN humanitarian coordination office (OCHA) should dedicate liaison officers to facilitate the relationships between international and Haitian humanitarian organizations, and help disseminate information on the international response into the camps, NGO offices and local communities around the country.

Ongoing initiatives which should also be encouraged include the potential tie-in of the NGO Coordination Support Office (NCSO) with an existing Haitian coordination body, as well as requests for local input into the ongoing Post Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) exercise being conducted by the Haitian government, multilateral institutions and major donors. Special attention should be paid to the civil society and Haitian government recommendations included in the PDNA scheduled for release on March 12th, prior to the planned donors' conference in New York on March 31st.

THE PRIORITY: PROTECTION AND SAFETY OF HAITIAN CIVILIANS

The presence of international military forces has been largely positive, especially given the speed and strength with which U.S. forces were deployed. The coordination with international aid organizations went smoothly, and

their logistical capabilities were well received. Yet civilians perceive that the focus of UN peacekeepers as well as U.S. and Canadian military forces has been mainly on the protection of humanitarian workers rather than on Haitians who are at greatest risk during this period of upheaval. International military forces need to pay greater attention to the day-to day security threats against civilians and find ways to support the Haitian security services while the country re-builds.

Initially, vast resources were directed towards protecting humanitarian convoys during distributions, a decision which was at times unwarranted and created further obstacles to communication and coordination between Haitian communities and humanitarian workers. Refugees International interviewed many displaced families who expressed their concern about security; women and children are particularly at risk for abuse and attacks at night inside the camps and report an absence of police patrols. One woman said: "We are completely vulnerable. One of us sleeps while another stands guard. There is nobody to watch out for us." Many unaccompanied minors do not have tents, and require continuous nighttime security protection until safe accommodations can be provided.

SUPPORTING THE DISPLACED: COUNTRY-WIDE DECENTRALIZED SUPPORT AND INVESTMENTS

Some 700,000 people in Port-au-Prince are without homes or proper shelter and another 600,000 people have left the capital. This has important implications for the overall development of the country. While the main focus of the humanitarian response has been on the Port-au-Prince area, the protection of displaced and affected families in the provinces requires both immediate assistance and longer term investments. The UN should increase its efforts and support existing activities to identify the needs of displaced people throughout the country.

Tents are in short supply in the settlements for displaced people both in the capital and in the provinces. Most people who have lost their homes sleep under makeshift dwellings of sheets and sticks providing little protection from the rain. The sanitation in the camps does not meet minimal international standards. The need for shelter poses immense logistical challenges and is intrinsically linked to land ownership and property rights, affecting both urban Haitians whose homes were destroyed as well as rural Haitians who depend on land for farming.

However, displaced people are not only in camps. Large numbers have sought refuge with relatives and friends who are quickly running out of resources. Refugees International has learned that families in Papaye, in Haiti's central valley,

now have on average 20-26 people in their homes. In Saint Marc, some 60 miles north of Port-au-Prince, the mayor has been organizing community support for the internally displaced. More than 25,000 have been registered, living in some 7,000 households. Refugees International also visited a school that remained closed because it housed displaced families. Such situations create a strain on already limited resources and infrastructure.

The mayor of Saint Marc has identified specific needs to increase city services, housing, extension of cultivated land, and infrastructural development for the influx of people. As of yet there has not been a coordinated registration exercise, but local agencies or authorities are conducting registrations in the camps as well as in host families. The UN agencies need to embrace these ad hoc initiatives to better identify the needs of displaced families.

If support is not channeled quickly into the provinces, the displaced will return to Port-au-Prince. This would only compound the challenges of distribution and coordination across the city, where at least 75 percent of the buildings have been destroyed and the ability to provide humanitarian assistance while protecting IDPs is overstretched. If support is invested in provincial communities, it will create a draw for those living in the Port-au-Prince camps to the provinces, lessening the strain in population-dense Port-au-Prince, while allowing for decentralized coordination and support of the displaced and host communities. Refugees International interviewed a man who explained: "Of course I want to go back to my village, but what job will I be able to get there?"

"Decentralization" has been the hot topic for the majority of Haitians. The infrastructure outside of Port-au-Prince is weak, and the capacity to absorb and support internally displaced people (IDPs) from the quake-impacted regions is thin. Within a disaster of this magnitude, however, exists the opportunity to support a decentralization movement and country-wide infrastructure investment that will not only provide urgent protection and support for IDPs, but will also address the imbalance in national development that contributed to great loss and vulnerability of Haitians in the Port-au-Prince area.

IMPROVING THE BUREAUCRACY: UN HUMANITARIAN LEADERSHIP IS CRUCIAL

Nearly one hundred UN staff were killed in the earthquake, among them Hédi Annabi, the Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG). While this tragedy affected the UN's ability to respond to the humanitarian crisis, the UN made extraordinary efforts to launch a massive relief operation. The coordination of an emergency of this

magnitude requires strong leadership, especially given the logistical difficulties in delivering assistance, the high number of aid organizations that volunteered to help, and the complex interface between political, military and humanitarian actors.

By all accounts, the leadership of the humanitarian country team is ineffectual. Following the earthquake, it took three weeks for the Humanitarian Coordinator to call a meeting with aid organizations. During his visit to Haiti, John Holmes, the UN's Emergency Relief Coordinator, chastised humanitarian colleagues by pointing out that "several clusters had yet to establish a concise overview of needs and develop coherent response plans, strategies and gap analyses." It required his personal intervention to shorten the time frame for the universal distribution of plastic sheeting from May 1st to April 1st. The rainy season is imminent, with thousands of Haitians sleeping outside, lacking even the minimal shelter that plastic sheeting provides. The scale of the humanitarian emergency demands stronger leadership in-country.

Refugees International has argued in other contexts that it is ineffective to establish one position in charge of both humanitarian response and development operations. In the case of Haiti, Kim Bolduc began in November 2009 to simultaneously hold three roles: Humanitarian Coordinator, Resident Coordinator and Deputy SRSG. This not only failed to achieve the intended coherence, but actually weakened coordination of the single largest humanitarian emergency of the past five years.

The appointment of Dan Baker in early February as Deputy Humanitarian Coordinator to strengthen the humanitarian coordination team was a welcome step. Refugees International recommends that Dan Baker be appointed as Humanitarian Coordinator for the remainder of his six month appointment.

THE EXPERTS: UNHCR AND PROTECTION LEADERSHIP IN NATURAL DISASTERS

In Haiti, the protection cluster, which leads all efforts to ensure Haitians' individual rights and physical security, is headed by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and supported by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR). This arrangement has not been effective, mainly due to OHCHR's limitations. OHCHR has little experience in delivering protection services in emergency situations, and as formally part of the UN Secretariat, rather than an independent agency, is not really set up to be operational, especially in a situation demanding quick action. For its part, UNHCR is abiding by the agreement of the UN country team, and endorsed by the Emergency Relief Coordinator

(ERC), John Holmes, to provide limited support to the protection and shelter clusters. It is unable to do more except at the express request of the ERC.

The humanitarian response in Haiti suffers from a lack of UN-led profiling and individual registration exercises. These are essential tasks in a humanitarian emergency to understand the full range of needs of the affected population and identify protection needs and gaps. Identifying the needs of displaced communities has implications not only for the immediate delivery of assistance, but also to better address protection concerns and longer-term solutions.

UNHCR stands willing to contribute more to the protection work in Haiti, and given the difficulties with cluster management that he himself has identified, Mr. Holmes might well consider requesting more immediate assistance from the Refugee Agency. The larger issue is where responsibility should lie for leadership for the protection response in natural disasters. UNHCR remains the operational agency most capable of performing this task, especially given its experience responding to humanitarian emergencies. But donor governments, notably the United States, have been reluctant to see UNHCR stray too far from its core mandate of assisting refugees who have sought asylum due to persecution or conflict.

At the last UNHCR Executive Committee meeting in September 2009 in Geneva, António Guterres, the High Commissioner for Refugees, argued that his agency had “the predictable leadership and proven results required” to respond to natural disasters. Refugees International supports this statement and in the context of future Inter-Agency Standing Committee deliberations urges UNHCR to be given the lead role in the protection cluster in future natural disaster emergencies. This is not an arcane debate without relevance to humanitarian needs: UNHCR is better equipped to improve the lives of displaced families.

THE BIG PICTURE: INCREASE USAID'S DISASTER FUNDING

The Haiti earthquake has highlighted the need for a better funded and stronger USAID Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), which is funded annually by Congress through the International Disaster Assistance (IDA) account. As soon as the disaster struck, the Obama administration triggered a massive government-wide response: sending troops, technical experts, and an emergency response team while mobilizing its diplomatic apparatus.

As of February 19, the U.S. had disbursed \$655 million in assistance, including \$255 million by the Department of Defense (DoD) and \$68 million in food aid. The Office of

Foreign Disaster Assistance has contributed approximately \$282 million, which represents a third of its FY2010 appropriated budget (before more funding is provided by a likely Congressional supplemental bill). More than \$125 million of OFDA's spending for Haiti went to other U.S. government agencies, including \$40 million to the Department of Defense for logistics and relief supplies.

As it stands, OFDA is left scrambling for additional funding to compensate for its budget shortfall, and aid organizations working in other humanitarian emergencies around the world have been warned about possible cuts in their funding. Refugees International recommends funding for the IDA account at no less than \$1.06 billion in the FY2011 Foreign Operations Appropriations bill to reflect global needs. In addition, Congress should replenish the IDA account in the amount of at least \$400 million in any emergency supplemental appropriations bill that helps address Haiti's needs.

CONCLUSION

The international community must take into consideration the transformative impact of the earthquake on the relations between Haiti and the Dominican Republic, where what happens in one country impacts the other on this small island, Hispaniola. The goodwill and governmental support in the Dominican Republic have been rightly praised, and the constant flows of people and goods between the two countries point to the need for close coordination in any developmental plan. The UN is one step ahead, and its Dominican-based team has initiated cross-border projects to assist displaced Haitians in rural areas along the border.

The damages to Port-au-Prince and its surrounding area have far-reaching implications that go beyond the reconstruction of the city. What is now required is reconstruction and investment in the entire country. The extent of the challenge is made more daunting by the need to address immediate protection needs for millions of Haitians, in particular immediate shelter for the hundreds of thousands who are sleeping in the streets. Coordinating these efforts, and ensuring the appropriate sequencing of programs, from removing rubble to quickly reviving the agricultural sector, will necessitate strong leadership as well as a long-term commitment on the part of the UN, the U.S. and other international donors. The first opportunity to show this commitment will be at the donors' conference in New York on March 31st.

Senior Advocate Patrick Duplat and Consultant Emilie Parry assessed the needs of Haitians affected by the January 12 earthquake in Port-au-Prince and surrounding areas in February.