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Thursday, July 1, 2010

President Barack Obama
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

Gender Action would like to thank you for your attention to post-earthquake Haiti recovery. Although the U.S. has made important contributions to Haiti disaster relief and rebuilding efforts, we believe that the flood of U.S.-supported post-earthquake assistance provides a crucial missed opportunity to greatly improve the lives of Haitian women and girls on the ground victimized by sexual violence.

On the sixth month anniversary of Haiti's devastating earthquake, Gender Action's analysis of International Financial Institution (IFI) post-earthquake assistance demonstrates that, incredibly, it fails to address Haiti's escalating gender-based violence. With the World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) positioned as the largest sources of post-earthquake aid, and given our nation's unique role in these IFIs, we ask your Administration to meet the pressing moral obligation of requiring IFIs to address Haiti's rapes and other gender-based violence. Therefore, we urge you to take immediate steps to ensure that U.S.-supported IFI assistance helps stop the perpetuation of rape and other gender-based violence in Haiti.

Malya Villard-Apollon, leader of the Haitian women's organization KOFAVIV, recently testified to the UN Human Rights Council that gender-based violence is an urgent concern needing immediate attention in refugee camps and beyond. "Conditions in the displacement camps, following the January 12 earthquake, have exacerbated women's vulnerability to rape," she said in her testimony. "Women and girls live in constant fear for their safety."

KOFAVIV, like many other grassroots organizations working to address gender issues in Haiti, has documented hundreds and hundreds of cases of rape and violence that have yet to be prosecuted. The organization cites inadequate security, lack of sufficient housing and lighting, and poor aid distribution that excludes civil society consultations as reasons for rampant rapes. To improve the current situation, KOFAVIV urged member States to condition multilateral funding on promoting women's rights.

The tragedies reported by organizations such as KOFAVIV are joined by recent media reports of enduring and rampant sexual violence against the women and girls of Haiti (*"Sexual Assaults Add to Miseries of Haiti's Ruins," by Deborah Sontag, New York Times, June 23 2010*).

As a member of the U.S. Haiti Advocacy Working Group, Gender Action has also heard the sad accounts relayed by our partner members. Recently, a few working group members investigated sexually-based violence against women in different refugee camps. Based on interviewing dozens of women and girls who had recently been raped, working group participants concluded that a great majority of cases involved gang rapes in unofficial camps and/or camps with little or no organized leadership. Many rape victims were afraid to come forward, fearing retribution from gang members and/or receiving little

support from local police. Hence, many cases go unreported. The rare cases that do make it to the courts are usually thrown out due to lack of physical evidence.

How can the U.S. permit the largest flow of donor assistance into post-earthquake Haiti, provided by the IFIs, to neglect to specifically address pervasive gender-based violence?

We also write to you out of concern for the cruel irony that Haiti's debt burden may be increased by the very aid it requires.

The U.S.--as the largest IFI shareholder, having considerable leverage in influencing IFI Haiti recovery efforts--must also ensure that IFIs make grants, rather than debt-incurring loans, to devastated Haiti. Impoverished Haitians cannot afford to spend their sparse precious resources, needed to support health, water, sanitation, education, shelter and other basic needs, on repaying IFI loans.

Gender Action's monitoring has found that the almost \$310 million approved by the IFIs for post-earthquake Haiti to date includes over \$172 million (56 percent) in new World Bank, IDB and International Monetary Fund (IMF) loans. IFI post-earthquake loans to Haiti include: World Bank loans for rural community driven development and education projects; IDB loans for a civil society registry, housing construction, and road rehabilitation; and an IMF loan for balance of payments support. The U.S. government must insist that all U.S.-supported "assistance" for post-earthquake Haiti be provided as grants, rather than as loans which prevent the government from addressing basic needs.

We ask you and Congress to pressure IFIs to adopt the three following priorities:

- 1) **Integrate gender assessments** into and address gender-based violence in IFI investments.
- 2) **Include data from local women's organizations** involved in participant-driven evaluations of temporary camps, housing, security, police-training, education, agricultural development, water, sanitation, healthcare, and job creation.
- 3) **Eliminate existing and prevent future IFI loan debt** that stymies Haiti from spending on desperately needed social services.

We urge you to pressure the IFIs to ensure their assistance routinely integrates gender analysis and addresses sexual violence. We ask that you use your influence with the U.S. Congress, Department of the Treasury, and Department of State to hold IFIs accountable to Haiti's urgent gender-based needs. Finally we request that you ensure that U.S.-supported IFI assistance prevents impoverished Haitians from being burdened by oppressive debt.

We thank you for your commitment to sustainable, country-driven Haiti recovery and for your leadership in protecting the rights of Haitian women and girls.

Sincerely,



Elaine Zuckerman
President, Gender Action