

Letter to Hon. P.J. Patterson Regarding Montreal Conference on Haitian Relief

Congratulations on your appointment as CARICOM's representative on the committee organising the international conference for the reconstruction of Haiti to be held in Montreal beginning Monday. Your experience with Haiti while being Prime Minister will be an invaluable asset in bringing a much-needed perspective that respects the Haitian people's own capabilities, leadership and initiative and the sovereignty of Haiti in the relief and rebuilding efforts.

I have been following events closely and wish to share the following observations with you.

While we must commend the speed and generosity of the international response to the Haitian disaster, we should also recognise that the international community, as a donor to Haiti over more than two decades, also bears responsibility for ill-conceived and poorly-conducted development, political interference, and unfulfilled promises in Haiti.

I support the view that on this occasion the reconstruction of the country should be carried out in a way that is effective and accountable to all Haitians and assigns to Haitians themselves the responsibility for identifying their immediate and long-term needs and for creating and strengthening the structures required.

I would argue strongly against an approach that is 'security-centred'; that militarizes the relief and rehabilitation effort; and that undermines Haitian ownership, initiative, responsibility and sovereignty. Rather, it should be based on the principles of solidarity, respect for their rights and respect for their country's sovereignty.

Here are some specific recommendations developed by the Canadian Council for International Co-operation, Oxfam Canada and Oxfam Québec which I fully endorse as being consistent with the above principles.

International assistance should:

- 1) Prioritize the delivery of Humanitarian Assistance by Civilian Agencies;
- 2) Protect the Rights of Vulnerable Populations;
- 3) Ensure Haitian Leadership, Ownership and Decision-Making; and,

4) Focus on Ending Poverty.

1) Prioritize the delivery of Humanitarian Assistance by Civilian Agencies

The challenges posed by the current operating environment in Haiti are huge, but reports indicate that aid efforts have been impeded by lack of access to airports and the slow delivery of supplies into the disaster site. The delivery and distribution of humanitarian assistance by civilian agencies should be considered the highest priority. There needs to be

- A clear delineation of roles between civilian aid workers and military personnel involved in the relief effort. Military forces currently on the ground are providing crucial logistical and operational support, while civilian agencies have the experience and expertise needed to deliver assistance. Assistance currently being provided by military personnel should be handed over to civilian agencies as soon as possible, leaving the military to focus on providing logistical and operational support.
- Highest priority assigned to civilian humanitarian supplies for the arrival, off loading and dispatching of cargo at Haiti's airports, ports and land borders.
- Coordination of relief operations should be the responsibility of the UN and the Haitian authorities, and should be carried out in a way that rebuilds and strengthens the capacity of Haitian institutions

2) Ensure Haitian leadership, ownership and decision-making

Haitians themselves were first responders to the earthquake. Although local organizations have been affected by the earthquake, the considerable capacity and skills of Haitians themselves must be respected and included in relief efforts. Accordingly, foreign countries and International agencies should:

- Work to ensure Haitians themselves, wherever possible, are leading relief and reconstruction efforts.
- Fund Haitian organizations, particularly women's groups, in relief, recovery, and reconstruction.
- Seek opportunities for including the Haitian diaspora in relief and recovery efforts, particularly those with French and Creole language skills.
- Prioritize the rebuilding of Haitian government ministries and departments that are responsible for providing basic services.

- Support Haitian community- driven efforts to improve the educational, food security and livelihood status of Haitian citizens.

3) Protect the Rights of Vulnerable Civilians

Haiti's vulnerable populations will require special protection measures. 36% of Haiti's population is under 15. Persons with disabilities, including those newly disabled by the earthquake, will find it difficult to access food, water and shelter. Women and girls are at an increased risk of sexual and gender based violence. Donors, international agencies and civil society should

- Ensure the principles of impartiality, neutrality, independence, and humanity guide the ongoing relief effort and that humanitarian and development activities are consistent with international humanitarian and human rights law.
- Prioritize the delivery of humanitarian assistance to vulnerable groups such as unaccompanied minors, the disabled, elderly, and women/girls, and ensure that their needs and priorities are addressed in the planning for Haiti's recovery, reconstruction, and longer-term development. To this end:
 - Ensure shelter and emergency camps are planned and built with disability access in mind.
 - Include persons with disabilities and organizations focused on disability rights in all initiatives and stages of relief, recovery, reconstruction, and longer-term development planning.
 - Establish rapid response mechanisms and measures to ensure the rights of all Haitian children are protected with priorities on preventing child trafficking and a moratorium on new international adoptions.
 - Encourage all countries contributing to MINUSTAH to train their personnel on preventing, protecting, and responding to sexual and gender-based violence prior to their deployment.

4) Ending Poverty

Poverty and fragility in Haiti is multi-faceted and includes significant tensions between a wealthier elite and poorer Creole-speaking parts of the population. Much of Haiti's GDP is allocated to annual debt service payments amounting to some \$60-\$80 million a year, limiting Haiti's capacity to invest in its own development. Real and sustained recovery and reconstruction will not be possible without addressing Haiti's longer term development, environmental, and governance issues. We should press for

- The immediate cancellation of all bilateral and multilateral debt owed by Haiti.
- The IMF to immediately convert the US\$100 million emergency loan to Haiti into a grant provided without any conditions.
- Ensuring that longer term assistance addresses both the immediate and structural causes of poverty in Haiti while working to provide relief and reconstruction to areas directly affected by the earthquake.
- Continuing to providing development aid to parts of the country not impacted by the earthquake, but still vulnerable to poverty.
- Supporting environmental programs spanning the recovery to development spectrum aimed at agriculture and reforestation.

In conclusion, I strongly support the view that Haiti needs to be rebuilt "from the bottom up". International donors and the Group of Friends of Haiti, must ensure the voices and the perspectives of Haiti's poor are heard and their rights respected. Haitian ownership and leadership, through the government, civil society, the diaspora, and the majority – women and men, girls and boys living in poverty, must be central in all efforts.

Yours in solidarity,

Norman Girvan

The following individuals and organizations have indicated their support for this letter

- (1) The Federation of Independent Trade Unions and NGOs (FITUN), Trinidad and Tobago
- (2) Sheilah Forward, Jamaica, Northern Jamaica Conservation Association (NJCA)
- (3) Robert Stephens, Jamaica, Jamaica Conservation Development Trust
- (4) Glenn Sankatsing, Aruba and Suriname, Caribbean Reality Studies Center
- (5) Juan Duchesne Winter, USA, University of Pittsburgh
- (6) Patricia Khan, Trinidad and Tobago
- (7) Deanne Girvan, Canada
- (8) Garry Girvan, Canada and Jamaica
- (9) Michael P. Witter, Jamaica, University of the West Indies,
- (10) Patrick Watson, Trinidad and Tobago, University of the West Indies
- (11) Diana Abraham, Canada, York University
- (12) Reginald Dumas, Trinidad and Tobago
- (13) Bob Thomson, Canada
- (14) Tomas Healey-Singh, Trinidad and Tobago
- (15) Aurea María Sotoamyor, Puerto Rico, University of Puerto Rico
- (16) **Érika Fontáñez-Torres, Puerto Rico**
- (17) **Annalee Davis, Visual Artist, Barbados**

- (18) [Alex Dupuy, Haiti/USA, Wesleyan University](#)
- (19) Joseph O Palacio, Belize
- (20) Ashwini Tambe, Canada, University of Toronto
- (21) Christian Wisskirchen, London/UK, Haiti Support Group
- (22) Gavin Fridell, Canada, Trent University
- (23) Judith Wedderburn, Jamaica
- (24) Peta-Anne Baker, Jamaica, University of the West Indies
- (25) Jean-Joseph Bellamy
- (26) Garvin Jeffers, Canada and Trinidad and Tobago
- (27) Deanne Bell, Kingston
- (28) Clinton Morris, UK
- (29) Cecil Ryan, St. Vincent
- (30) Joyce Van Genderen-Naar, Netherlands and Suriname
- (31) Fragano Legister, USA, Clark Atlanta University
- (32) Brenda King, Brussels, European Economic and Social Committee
- (33) Alissa Trotz, Canada and Guyana, University of Toronto
- (34) Melanie Newton, Canada and Barbados, University of Toronto
- (35) Gage Averill, Canada, University of Toronto
- (36) Ann Denis, Canada, University of Ottawa
- (37) Jo Anne Harris, USA, Georgia Institute of Technology
- (38) Jo-Anne S. Ferreira, Trinidad and Tobago, University of the West Indies
- (39) Heather Horst, USA, University of California, Irvine
- (40) Rita Keresztesi, USA, University of Oklahoma
- (41) Claire-Helene Heese Boutin, Canada/Haiti, University of Toronto
- (42) Monica Gordon, USA, Walden University
- (43) Glyne Griffith, USA/Barbados, State University of New York at Albany
- (44) Camille Hernandez-Ramdwar, Canada, Ryerson University
- (45) Otilia Rosas González, Venezuela, Universidad Simón Bolívar
- (46) Deborah A. Thomas, USA/Jamaica, University of Pennsylvania
- (47) Mary Nyquist, Canada, University of Toronto
- (48) Linda Peake, Canada, York University
- (49) Patrick Taylor, Canada, York University
- (50) Phillip Johnson, Jamaica, NJCA~Northern Jamaica Conservation Association
- (51) Gabrielle Henderson, Trinidad and Tobago, University of the West Indies,
- (52) Donna Weir-Soley, USA, Florida International University.
- (53) CAFRA – Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action, Trinidad and Tobago
- (54) Claremont Kirton, Jamaica, University of the West Indies
- (55) Wendy A. Lee, Jamaica, Northern Jamaica Conservation Association
- (56) Roberto Ortiz Feliciano, San Juan, Puerto Rico
- (57) Rupert Lewis, Jamaica, University of the West Indies
- (58) Cikiah Thomas, Canada, Global Afrikan Congress
- (59) Surendrini Wijeyaratne, Policy Analyst, Canadian Council for International Co-operation
- (60) Ruel Cooke, Jamaica
- (61) Faith Smith, USA/Jamaica, Brandeis University
- (62) Sir Ronald Sanders, Guyana
- (63) Marcia Forbes, Jamaica, University of the West Indies
- (64) Martha Bragin, USA, City University of New York
- (65) Anita Baksh, USA, University of Maryland

- (66) Hilbourne Watson, USA/Barbados, Bucknell University
- (67) Kathleen McAfee, USA, San Francisco State University
- (68) Jacqui Alexander, USA/Trinidad and Tobago, University of Toronto
- (69) Trudy Myers Edwards, Weston, Florida
- (70) Amina Blackwood Meeks, Jamaica
- (71) Beverley-Anne Carter, Trinidad and Tobago, University of the West Indies
- (72) Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes, USA, University of Michigan
- (73) Charles Simon Aaron, Toronto, Canada
- (74) Ava-Gail Gardiner, Jamaica, Visions of the Caribbean Ltd.
- (75) Sean Hawkins, USA, University of Toronto
- (76) Myna Lee Johnstone, Canada
- (77) Michelle Rowley, USA/Trinidad and Tobago, University of Maryland
- (78) Elaine Thomas, Atlanta, Georgia and Jamaica
- (79) Allyson Leacock, Barbados, Caribbean Broadcast Media Partnership on HIV/AIDS
- (80) Jocelyne Guilbault, USA/Canada, University of California, Berkeley
- (81) Trina deSouza, Canada, University of Toronto
- (82) Ileana Sanz Cabrera, Jamaica, University of the West Indies
- (83) Willi Nolan, Canada
- (84) Dorianne Rowan-Campbell, Jamaica, International Development Consultant
- (85) Rinaldo Walcott, Canada, University of Toronto
- (86) O. Nigel Bolland, USA, Colgate University
- (87) Pedro A. Noguera, USA and Trinidad and Tobago, New York University
- (88) Matthew Joseph, USA, Florida International University
- (89) Berbeth "Marsha" Foster, USA, University of Miami School of Law
- (90) Jocelyn A. Géliga Vargas, Puerto Rico, University of Puerto Rico-Mayaguez
- (91) Mike James, Trinidad and Tobago, Antilles Episcopal Conference
- (92) Liisa North, Canada, York University
- (93) Nancy Mikelsons, USA
- (94) Tisha Nickenig, Trinidad and Tobago, University of the West Indies
- (95) Claudette Francis, Consultant Psychologist, Director SILC
- (96) Abdelbagi Jibril, Geneva, Switzerland, Darfur Relief and Documentation Centre
- (97) Milagro García Villamil, Cuba/USA
- (98) Dianna A. DaSilva, Guyana, University of Guyana
- (99) Nidhi Tandon, Canada, Networked Intelligence for Development
- (100) Christopher Arif Bulkan, Barbados/Guyana, University of the West Indies
- (101) Xuan Li, Italy and China
- (102) Saul Landau, USA, Institute for Policy Studies
- (103) Dr. Gail Lewis, UK, Open University
- (104) Robert Gregory, Jamaica
- (105) Beverley Mullings, Canada/Jamaica, Queens University
- (106) Efrén Rivera-Ramos, Puerto Rico, University of Puerto Rico
- (107) Basil Thomas, Canada
- (108) Luin Goldring, Canada, York University
- (109) Vikas Nath, Canada/India
- (110) Heather Andrade, USA, Florida International University
- (111) Soyini Ashby, Jamaica, University of the West Indies
- (112) Charis Newton, Canada
- (113) Michael Palmer, Jamaica

- (114) Vilma Dube, Canada
- (115) Jacqueline Jean-Baptiste, Canada
- (116) Vivian Auffant, Puerto Rico, University of Puerto Rico, Rio Pedras
- (117) Myriam Chancy, USA, University of Cincinnati
- (118) Astrid Jacques, Canada/Haiti, Alfie Roberts Institute, Montreal
- (119) Taitu Heron, Jamaica
- (120) Hope McNish, Jamaica
- (121) Ifeoma Kiddoe Nwankwo
- (122) Cuthbert Joseph, Trinidad and Tobago, Ambassador
- (123) Louis Davis, USA
- (124) John de Carteret, UK
- (125) Marie Claire Walker, Canada, Canadian Labour Congress & Coalition of Black Trade Unionists
- (126) Yves Renard, St Lucia
- (127) June Larkin, Canada, University of Toronto
- (128) Judith Deutsch, Canada, University of Toronto
- (129) Layann Lee
- (130) Lynn Bolles, USA, University of Maryland
- (131) Pat Northover, Jamaica, University of the West Indies
- (132) Ruth Gilmore, USA
- (133) Russell Bell, Jamaica, YESCuba
- (134) Meryl James-Sebro, USA and Trinidad and Tobago
- (135) Vaughan Lewis, St Lucia
- (136) Anastasia Deonarinesingh, Trinidad and Tobago/Canada, University of Toronto
- (137) Milagros Martinez, Cuba, University of Havana
- (138) Shannon Pritchard, Canada
- (139) Michelle Murphy, Canada, University of Toronto
- (140) Cary Fraser, USA and Guyana, Penn State University
- (141) Una Coghlan
- (142) Timothy Shaw UWI, Trinidad and Tobago and Canada
- (143) Manuel Pantin, Trinidad and Tobago
- (144) Board of Directors of The Trust For Sustainable Livelihoods, Caribbean
- (145) Walter Brooker, Canada
- (146) Patrick Hunter, Canada
- (147) Patsy Lewis, Jamaica and Grenada, University of the West Indies
- (148) Tara Hurford
- (149) Hilkieah Hinds, UK
- (150) Celia Karch Brathwaite
- (151) Ulric Trotz, Guyana/Belize
- (152) Franklin McDonald, Jamaica
- (153) Ana Vera, Cuba
- (154) Gwyndolyn Weathers, USA
- (155) Esmond Toppin
- (156) Cathy Fergie
- (157) Jackie Huggins, Trinidad and Tobago, University of the West Indies
- (158) Danielle Lyndersay, Trinidad and Tobago, University of the West Indies
- (159) William Carter, Trinidad and Tobago

At least thirteen additional signatures were received after the list closed at midnight Monday January 25th. We apologise to all those whose names do not appear.