

United States Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations

Haiti: From Rescue to Recovery and Reconstruction

M. Rony Francois, MD, MSPH, PhD

January 28, 2010

Good morning Chairman Kerry, Ranking Member Lugar and members of the Committee.

My name is Dr. Rony Francois. I am a physician and a doctor of Public Health by training.

I am also the immediate past Secretary of Health for the State of Florida as well as the immediate past Director of Public Health for the State of Louisiana. Effective Monday, I will be the Director of Public Health for the State of Georgia.

I want to thank the Committee for inviting me to testify on the topic of “Haiti: From Rescue to Recovery and Reconstruction”. My testimony will focus on the following: 1) Extent of the damages, 2) the immediate relief needs, 3) some intermediate goals, and 4) the long-term path to recovery and development.

Extent of the Damages:

An earthquake of 7.0 magnitude is a challenge for any country. But when it occurs in one of the world’s most fragile countries, its intensity seems potentiated as it finds a destructive and sinister synergy in the vast landscape of feeble structures.

The estimated mortality is about 200,000. There are about 4,000 missing Americans. The number of injured approaches 1 million. The number of people affected is approximately 3 million. The economic damage is difficult to quantify.

My mother and father in law lost everything in Haiti. Fortunately, they were in the United States with me when the devastation occurred.

Immediate Relief Needs:

With the great number of people affected, the critical needs are food and water, medical care, temporary shelters, security and sanitation. In terms of diet, the most vulnerable groups are the newborns and young infants who require age-appropriate formula.

However, tensions in the Capital city and also the countryside continue to grow as many families do not have access to food and other basic goods. The escalation of frustration is already inducing violence and if resources are not more strategically distributed throughout the country, the security situation on the ground could rapidly deteriorate.

Medical teams must also remain vigilant about wound infections, sepsis, malaria, tetanus, respiratory infections, and typhoid as thousands more could die if conditions are not closely monitored and immediate steps are not taken to mitigate risks.

Intermediate Goals:

In light of over 50 aftershocks of a magnitude of 4.5 or greater, a thorough assessment of the structural integrity of remaining homes and buildings is absolutely critical for the future safety of the population. Before entering the U.S. and earning his doctorate degree in structural engineering - specializing in foundations and water resources - my brother

worked as an engineer in Port-au-Prince and building codes at that time did not exist and construction practices were geared to withstand hurricane wind forces and not earthquakes.

In order to forecast the magnitude and hence the cost of debris/rubble removal and disposal, it is appropriate to compare this recovery effort to the models and lessons learned after the September 11, 2001 destruction at the World Trade Centers, after Hurricane Ivan's aftermath in Pensacola, Florida and after Hurricane Katrina's devastation of the Gulf Coast States – where recovery is still ongoing today.

The materials collected during this cleanup can be recycled or transported as fill for reclamation land along the coast of the Bay of Port-au-Prince.

Assuring proper drainage of rainwater will be a massive undertaking with the Mountain l'Hopital's steep watershed and the drastic reduction of pervious areas with tree cutting practices and anarchistic construction. The existing system was already obsolete and undersized and did not seem to rely on accurate hydrological data. In addition, with the earthquake's underground stresses generated from the wave propagation, it must be anticipated that the majority of structures and pipes (mostly concrete) have sustained irreversible damage.

The waterworks and sewer infrastructures gauged against current Environmental Engineering standards were already inadequate. Construction from scratch might be considered.

The source of the water supply might be adjusted after evaluation of the Cul-de-Sac Plain aquifer capacity and inventory of other reserves through groundwater hydrology. Another very viable option is to tap in the Bay of Port-au-Prince readily available sea saltwater through a desalination process.

Long-Term Reconstruction and Development:

Decentralization away from Port-au-Prince must be a primary goal of future development efforts. The earthquake has already triggered an exodus of the population to various parts of Haiti. In order for that migration to become permanent, investments must be made in agriculture, food security, local jobs, tourism infrastructure, security, roads, and airports.

Access to rudimentary medical care must also be decentralized with a network of community health centers across the country. Public health must become the foundation of this new health system and foster the widespread training and use of health promoters or agents of health.

Improvements in literacy should also remain central to any development efforts.

I would like to share with the Committee a few of the recommendations of the Haiti Advisory Group created by Executive Order on July 14, 2004 by former Florida Governor,

Jeb Bush. The Advisory Group consisted of 17 prominent Haitian-American members with significant experience in Haitian issues. The Advisory Group formulated a set of 25 recommendations to the Governor and the State of Florida. These prophetic recommendations, which are still very relevant today, included a wide range of problematic issues that fall into the following categories:

- Security Recommendations**

- Economic Development Recommendations**

- Disaster Preparedness/Environmental Rehabilitation**

Although Florida was the main partner for these projects, I would propose that these recommendations be adopted by the United Nations. Examples include:

- Creation of a dedicated Professional Exchange and Training Program with the Government of Haiti. This would allow volunteers, utilizing their vast experience and skills, to travel to Haiti to provide in-country technical assistance/training. The objective of the professional exchange and training program would be to provide Haitian participants with the knowledge, skills, and resources they need to work more effectively in their respective fields and to build greater capacity within Haitian institutions.**

For example, Haiti produces only about 80 physicians each year, but that number will steeply decline since many of the medical schools were destroyed. What will happen to medical-students already enrolled? How will they complete their studies? Will opportunities to study abroad be made available? A sharp increase of injured and a sharp decrease in doctors creates a formula for an intractable disaster.

- **The international community should utilize its great expertise and experience in law enforcement, corrections, and public safety to assist the growth and professionalization of the Haitian National Police (HNP).**
- **The United Nations could sponsor a Haiti Trade Mission and Matchmaker Fair in which representatives of Haitian businesses can travel abroad to meet with counterparts. Promotion of investment in Haiti, as well as networking and identification of export opportunities for Haitian products would be primary goals.**
- **The United Nations should begin now to assist Haiti's Ministry of Commerce, Industry, & Tourism in its plan to create a targeted tourism marketing campaign to attract Haitian-Americans and other visitors to their country as tourists in order to rediscover its natural beauty and historical attractions.**

- **Haiti's infrastructure is now exponentially more vulnerable to hurricane induced disasters like mud-slides and flooding. Hurricane season begins June 1st and immediate action must be taken to mitigate potential risks. The United Nations should employ its well-developed expertise and experience with natural disasters to provide technical assistance to the Republic of Haiti's Directorate of Civil Protection, in order for this agency to develop appropriate disaster management infrastructure and training.**

In closing, I extend fervent prayers to all of those who are affected by the earthquake as well as the first responders who have come from near and far. I also want to acknowledge the magnanimous generosity of those who have contributed to the relief efforts in Haiti. As we move forward, the United States and the international community must assure that investments made in rebuilding Haiti are actually carried out through community-based organizations, faith-based entities, non-governmental agencies, and non-profit organizations. My personal hope is that a new generation of leaders will emerge from these ashes to selflessly lead Haiti onto a new path of prosperity through integrity, hard work, transparency, perseverance and true democracy.

Thank You.