

Opening Statement
Ranking Member Dan Burton
Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere
Committee on Foreign Affairs
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The Hurricanes in Haiti: Disaster and Recovery

I would like to thank the Chairman for holding today's hearing on the current disaster relief efforts in Haiti. The U.S. is the largest provider of bilateral foreign assistance to Haiti and we have held multiple hearings on Haiti in the past two years, including an appearance by Wyclef Jean who testified in front of this Subcommittee in March of 2007 regarding his impressive program for Haitian children that combines schooling, soccer and afterschool study. I would like to welcome those of you here today to discuss how we can achieve better success in helping Haiti during this devastating time.

Haiti is one of the most difficult challenges in our hemisphere. Successive efforts by our government, other nations and international bodies focused on helping Haitians reach an average living standard have failed, and it is challenging to determine how to best adjust our method to achieve a greater benefit in the future.

There is very little that remains consistent in Haiti besides turbulence and change. In the past two years Haiti experienced a change in the presidency, a food shortage that culminated in the ousting of the Haitian Prime Minister, essentially paralyzing the government, and a Tropical Storm and Hurricane that ravished the country side.

Throughout such turbulence, international efforts to improve the situation in Haiti have continued unabated. The United Nations, the U.S. State Department, USAID, non governmental organizations, foreign governments and private investors continue to send aid, build roads, schools and homes, and develop investment strategies to provide long term benefits.

The remaining problem, and what I hope we discuss today, is Haiti's ability to fully absorb the funds and program assets in a way that provides sustainable developments. In the end, it is the Haitian government, leaders and people who have to make Haiti the better place we all hope to see it become.

As I said last week at the hearing we held on Foreign Assistance in the Americas, ensuring that the most effective method is used to distribute foreign aid is not only beneficial to the nations receiving our donations, but is an obligation we owe to the hard working American people who provide the government with these funds. And in these trying times that can not be emphasized enough.

With these important challenges before us, I'd like to thank our distinguished panelists for being here today, and I look forward to hearing from you on this important topic.