

Congresswoman Barbara Lee CA-09
Committee on Foreign Affairs
Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere
The Hurricanes in Haiti: Disaster and Recovery
September 23, 2008

Thank you Chairman Engel and Ranking Member Burton for your leadership on issues vital to the needs of the Caribbean people. I also want to thank Chairman Berman, for allowing me to testify.

I want to commend all of my colleagues who have joined me to testify today. And I want to thank the staff, particularly Jason Steinbaum for organizing this hearing.

As a member of the Foreign Affairs committee and a former member of the Western Hemisphere Subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to be here with you.

I will briefly offer my thoughts on the crisis in Haiti caused by the recent hurricanes and draw some comparisons to the situation in Grenada after hurricane Ivan in 2004. I also want to offer some potential long term solutions to address some of the systemic problems in Haiti.

As my colleagues have mentioned, the situation in Haiti is dire. Like much of the Caribbean and the United States, the recent hurricanes have devastated Haiti.

The storms caused massive flooding, mud slides, damaged infrastructure, destroyed bridges, and led to hundreds of deaths.

Most of the port city of Gonaives, the second largest city after Port-au-Prince, remains under water. Although the destruction of Gonaives is probably the most visible, the damage in Haiti extends far inland to the mountainous and rural areas throughout the Central Plateau.

As the water begins to subside, the people of Haiti are now struggling with the spread of both air and water-borne diseases. Cases of malnutrition in children are rising as reports indicate that there is not enough food to feed the hungry and access to clean water is scarce.

Clearly, the people of Haiti are in need of emergency assistance.

The Government of Haiti has specifically asked for \$400 million in aid to help in the wake of this disaster. In addition, President Preval has asked for at least 25 helicopters with pilots to help the country get food to storm victims in remote areas.

President Preval has also called for the United States to grant Temporary Protective Status (TPS) to Haitians in the United States.

By helping Haiti with these requests, we can stand in solidarity with its people during this difficult time.

I am pleased that we have already provided approximately \$29 million in humanitarian assistance to Haiti, but much more is needed.

I join my colleague Maxine Waters in calling for at least \$300 million to immediately assist the people of Haiti to rebuild.

As a member of the Appropriations Subcommittee on State and Foreign Operations, I am working with my Chairwoman, Nita Lowey, to ensure that the United States provides urgent humanitarian assistance to Haiti.

I will also be introducing a resolution expressing support for Caribbean countries devastated by the Hurricanes and calling for increased emergency humanitarian assistance to help them recover. I look forward to working with the Committee on this important measure.

As we move to act in Haiti, I am reminded of our efforts to assist Grenada to rebuild in the wake of Hurricane Ivan in 2004.

Back then, there was a disconnect between the rest of the Caribbean countries and the United States. However, following the devastation in Grenada, we worked together in a bipartisan way to build stronger ties with the Caribbean region to provide disaster relief.

We coordinated meetings with CARICOM diplomats about disaster relief and recovery efforts in the aftermath of the hurricane season.

We worked with USAID and the State Department congressional liaisons to find out what support was being offered and what resources were needed to assist the region.

We unanimously passed in the House a bi-partisan resolution—H. Con. Res. 496, calling for increased emergency assistance to the Caribbean.

As a result of these efforts, we delivered \$100 million in disaster assistance to the Caribbean.

Afterwards, I helped lead a Committee CODEL to Grenada to assess the damages on the ground and to identify long-term policy solutions to the problems it faced.

As we work to provide assistance to Haiti, I am pleased that the Committee has taken many of these same actions. While we deliver urgent support to its people, we must also identify long term solutions to Haiti's problems.

In May of this year, Congresswoman Kilpatrick and I led a congressional delegation to Haiti to examine some of these problems, particularly the impact of soaring food prices.

At that time, Haiti was still recovering from last year's hurricanes and we feared what might happen if another storm hit Haiti before the rebuilding process was complete.

It was clear to us, that Haiti's food shortages, severe deforestation, poor sanitation, lack of family planning and healthcare services, high unemployment, and underdeveloped agriculture could not be solved by emergency assistance alone.

That is why, working with Chairman Engel, I introduced H.R. 6255 the Next Steps for Haiti Act of 2008. This bill will provide technical expertise and build human capacity to help Haiti address its own problems.

Many Haitian Americans living in the U.S. have technical expertise in areas such as agriculture, education, health care, and infrastructure development, and want to return to Haiti to assist their people. My bill creates a mechanism to transfer this knowledge in order to meet the needs and goals of Haiti.

Beyond that, we need to ensure that we find innovative ways to build human capacity through education exchange programs, like those I have proposed in H.R. 176, the Shirley Chisholm U.S. - Caribbean Educational Exchange Bill.

Mr. Chairman, I appreciate your help and the Committee's efforts in passing this bill through the House last year. It is currently awaiting action on the Senate Floor and I hope we can pass it before we adjourn.

In closing, I believe that we need a comprehensive strategy to assist the Caribbean to recover from these natural disasters.

I also believe that we have a responsibility to examine our own role in the crises that Haiti currently faces. Specifically, I believe we should examine the February 2004 Coup and ouster of President Aristide. I hope that the committee will consider my bill H.R. 351, The Truth Act.

Thank you again, Mr. Chairman. I look forward to answering any questions.