

## **The Hurricanes in Haiti: Disaster and Recovery**

### **Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere Committee on Foreign Affairs**

#### **Statement by Rep. Maxine Waters**

**September 23, 2008**

I would like to begin by thanking my colleague, Eliot Engel, the Chairman of the Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, for inviting me to testify at this hearing on “The Hurricanes in Haiti: Disaster and Recovery.” I am honored to be here.

I have traveled to Haiti many times, and I have seen the poverty and the pride of the Haitian people with my own eyes. Haiti is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, and it has suffered through several natural disasters. In September of 2004, Hurricane Jeanne pounded Haiti with torrential rain. The storm caused extensive flooding, destroyed at least 5,000 homes, and killed more than 1,000 people.

But no past storms or other experiences can compare to the storms that hit Haiti over the last month. Haiti has been struck by four hurricanes and tropical storms in rapid succession: Fay, Gustav, Hanna, and Ike. Severe flooding, landslides, wind and sea surge damage has affected the entire country. The government of Haiti estimated that 600 people have been killed and an additional 850,000 people have been affected by the storms. According to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), more than 10,000 houses have been destroyed and more than 35,000 houses have been damaged. There are more than 150,000 internally displaced persons in Haiti.

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), up to 800,000 people – almost 10 percent of the population of Haiti – are in dire need of humanitarian assistance. OCHA also reported that the entire harvest for the current agricultural season has been severely damaged or destroyed. Many roads and bridges also have been damaged or destroyed. Almost all agricultural land in the country has been flooded. There is a desperate need for food, clean water, and health services. Immediate international assistance is critical to save lives and rebuild homes and infrastructure. OCHA issued an appeal for \$108 million to provide humanitarian and early recovery assistance to survivors over the next six months.

According to Hedi Annabi, the United Nations’ special envoy to Haiti, the scale of the disaster has overwhelmed both the United Nations mission and the Haitian government. He called on the international donor community to take extraordinary measures to address the situation. Annabi reported that the damage in the agricultural sector alone is estimated at more than \$200 million. He also said, “The people have lost everything in the floods and the cleaning and the reconstruction work will be enormous and very costly.”

The Embassy of Haiti has provided my office a detailed list of needs. The list is varied and includes portable bridges, patrol boats, life jackets, rehabilitation of major ports, water pumps, water pipes, and sewage cleanup supplies.

The Haitian government is also seeking a total of 2,265 agricultural tool kits. The kits are to be distributed throughout the country in order to begin the process of restoring the agricultural sector. Each kit would include 8 shovels, 4 rakes, 3 soil tillers, 4 wheelbarrows, 6 flashlights, 22 batteries, 20 pairs of boots, 20 raincoats, and a few other items. These items may not seem expensive to us in the United States, but to supply such basic items to farmers throughout the country is well beyond the current capacity of the Haitian government. Yet without these simple tools, it is unlikely the people of Haiti will be able to grow their own food long after the flood waters recede.

On September 11th, I sent a letter to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi requesting an emergency appropriation of \$300 million for disaster assistance for Haiti, and 67 Members of Congress signed my letter.

The Administration recently requested one billion in development assistance for Georgia. A mere fraction of that amount would help thousands of hungry and displaced Haitians survive and begin to rebuild their communities. Haiti's needs are at least as great as Georgia's, and Haiti is an impoverished island nation just south of American shores. I urge the members of this subcommittee to support my request for \$300 million in disaster assistance for Haiti.

I deeply appreciate the opportunity to testify at this hearing, and I commend the members of the Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere for their interest in the needs of the Haitian people.