

## **Statement of Chairman Dan Burton**

### **Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere Committee on International Relations**

#### **“Moving Forward in Haiti: How the U.S. and the International Community Can Help**

**September 28, 2006**

Today, we convene a hearing on Moving Forward in Haiti and how the United States and international community can help. This fragile country, generally recognized as being the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, has been through tumultuous times. In recent decades, it has survived natural disasters that brought hurricane winds and terrible mudslides, taking lives and devastating crops; well established gangs control city streets and spread fear among the population; economic growth is dismally low and the people lack the most basic of needs, such as housing, education and access to healthcare; and its democracy has been shocked by years of corruption and poor, misguided leadership. Today, Haiti has some forward momentum in its newly elected government, but the situation still remains fragile, and Haiti, is clearly at a critical juncture in its path away from poverty.

First, ensuring peace and security for all of her people remains one of Haiti’s biggest hurdles. Gangs and crime inhibit the growth of the economy and hinder many aspects of the development process. The national police force lacks the basic operating needs, and requires extensive training assistance and equipment for it to function effectively. It’s impossible for businesses to take root and the economy to grow, providing good jobs for the Haitian people while armed and organized bands of criminals roam neighborhoods unchecked. Programs aimed at disarming these rogue elements need to be expanded and a culture of lawfulness needs to be instilled into the minds of the Haitian people. The presence of United Nations peacekeepers has helped stabilize the security situation to some degree; currently the MINUSTAH mission is providing 6,700 peacekeeping personnel from more than a dozen countries and it appears to be helping to provide a more secure and stable environment, build support for the ongoing political process, and promoting and protecting fundamental human rights; but more needs to be done.

In addition to a stabilizing force, Haiti is in dire need of international assistance in a host of areas. For example, Haitian schools lack the proper supplies to effectively teach the children and the quality of educational instruction in general needs to be dramatically increased at all levels. Furthermore, Haitians have limited access to healthcare and suffer from many treatable diseases, such as malaria and elephantitis, but they are unable to obtain the proper medication and treatment. The people even lack access to the most basic infrastructure such as access to electricity and sanitation.

I am encouraged to see many Non-Governmental Organizations working in Haiti to help resolve the problems I mentioned, as well as many other challenges. Results are being seen in the rebuilding of the infrastructure, agriculture sector, and overall welfare of the people. These are critical steps in the right direction. But NGO resources are limited and the steps are small. Much more can and needs to be done and I hope more NGOs will become involved.

The United States, primarily through USAID, is the largest international donor to Haiti. Programs in Child Survival and Health, HIV/AIDS, and in improving Rule of Law are some of the many areas that the United States is getting involved in. And this Congress, in the last Emergency Supplemental, provided Haiti with an additional \$5 million in Child Survival and Health funds and \$17.5 million in Economic Support Funds. In addition, this Committee, in a bipartisan effort supported by many Members of this Subcommittee, recently passed H.R. 611, the Haiti Economic and Infrastructure Reconstruction Act. This bill establishes an entirely new and innovative program designed to recruit and send Haitian-Americans back to the Republic of Haiti to help reclaim their heritage by helping to rebuild the country's economy and infrastructure. As a proud co-sponsor of the bill I am working closely with other Subcommittee Members, Members of the full Committee and Leadership to hopefully, bring this bill to floor by the end of the year and get it passed by the whole house.

The United States is doing its share. The international community also needs to step up and do its part. That is why the Administration is working closely with the United Nations and other Donor Countries to bring more funding to the table. It is encouraging to see other countries, such as Canada, take a large role in helping the people of this struggling nation. In 2004, Canada pledged over \$180 million to Haiti over two years and so far they have come through with more than \$130 million of that pledge. In July of this year, international donors pledged another \$750 million to help the people of Haiti. So, the international community is moving in the right direction, but we must stay committed to the Haitian people and we must ensure that donors follow through on our promises.

President Rene Preval was inaugurated in May of 2006 after a free and fair election. In the months since taking office, he has tried to build a government that is inclusive of many of the political parties of the country; and it is seen by the people of Haiti and the international community as having great promise. Municipal elections will take place in November and it is hoped that this will provide an even larger platform upon which to build a positive future. There are many challenges still ahead but I am very optimistic about the future of Haiti and I am looking forward to hearing the comments of our witnesses on the direction of U.S. and international policy towards Haiti. Thank you.