

**Testimony of**

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**“U.S. Humanitarian Response to the Hurricanes in Haiti”**

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, it is a privilege to appear before the Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere of the House Foreign Affairs Committee to report on USAID's response to the hurricanes in Haiti. USAID's response has been immediate and crucial, but the needs in Haiti will be severe for the foreseeable future.

I am joined by my colleague Ky Luu from the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, who can address technical questions about our disaster relief efforts. I am also pleased to be joined in this panel by my colleagues from the United States Southern Command and the Department of State.

I also appreciate hearing from Rep. Meek and the other Members who recently visited Haiti. The leadership provided by Members of Congress on Haiti has been essential to strengthening our country's commitment to Haiti.

### ***Background***

For over fifty years, Haitians have suffered from a series of violent social and political upheavals. The government changes were capricious, almost never the result of transparent or predictable election cycles, and were frequently accompanied by repression of dissenting voices. These political and security crises have been hugely detrimental to Haiti's economic and social development. Haiti remains the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere and some social, economic and environmental indicators are among the weakest in the world. Nearly 80% of the population lives on less than \$2 per day. Unemployment and underemployment remain major problems. One out of every eight children dies before reaching the age of five.

The widespread poverty seriously impairs the ability of Haiti's citizens to purchase sufficient food, and an estimated 2.5 million Haitians experience chronic food insecurity. A dramatic rise in food prices earlier this year led to food riots in April. These riots resulted in the ousting of Prime Minister Alexis, and a tumultuous period of several months without an effective government.

As you all know, Haiti is experiencing one of the worst natural disasters in its recent history. Within the space of three weeks, between August 15 and September 7, Haiti was hit by four major storms. Between August 15 and 16, Tropical Storm Fay moved across the Island of Hispaniola, through the Dominican Republic and Haiti, resulting in three continuous days of heavy rainfall and flooding. On August 26, Tropical Storm Gustav passed over Haiti and additional rainfall and winds affected eight of Haiti's ten Departments, bringing widespread flooding before moving on to hit Jamaica on August 28. Beginning on September 1, Tropical Storm Hanna brought still more rainfall and winds throughout the country. Finally, on September 7, heavy rains from Hurricane Ike had a significant impact on Haiti, compounding and extending the flooding into previously unaffected areas.

### ***Damage***

The passage of four tropical weather systems within less than a month caused widespread suffering among the Haitian people, affecting housing, agriculture, public infrastructure, and education.

To date, the Government of Haiti has reported 423 confirmed deaths, with approximately 850,000 people having lost homes or livelihoods. Over 100,000 people are currently staying in temporary shelters across the country. Because of high water levels and many feet of mud, thousands are forced to live on rooftops, waiting for flood waters to recede. The damage is country-wide, affecting all major population centers outside the capital, as well as rural areas. Some of the most dramatic damage occurred in the city of Gonaives, where floodwaters covered much of the city and surrounding countryside.

Before the storms impacted the island, Haiti was already suffering from the global food crisis. Violent protests were staged in provincial towns and Port-au-Prince in April 2008 by Haitians unable to meet the rising cost of food. After Hurricane Ike, preliminary assessments confirmed that Haiti's agricultural sector suffered severe damage in the wake of the storms and the entire harvest of the current agricultural season was either lost or severely damaged. Standing maize, sorghum, bean, cassava and banana plantations have been destroyed in at least 75 communes in the ten regions of the country. While multiple relief organizations are responding rapidly to deliver water, food, and supplies to the victims, the humanitarian situation remains precarious, especially given inadequate access to affected areas. Important emergency food stocks designed to meet Haiti's needs for the next few months have been rapidly depleting due to increased need for emergency distribution as a result of the storms.

Flooding and landslides destroyed key bridges and roads, cutting off many land routes and hampering humanitarian assistance efforts. The cutoff of vital arteries around the country has led Haitian President Préval to call his country today

“ungovernable.” The destruction of Haiti’s infrastructure has not yet been fully assessed.

### ***U.S. Government Humanitarian Response***

USAID Administrator Henrietta H. Fore recently visited Haiti, where she saw first-hand the extensive devastation caused by the storms. She also met with Haitian President Préval and discussed the urgent need for a coherent and coordinated response from the international donor community. USG disaster response teams on the ground work closely with Government of Haiti counterparts in all aspects of planning and execution of the disaster response. We also maintain close coordination with other international donors and aid organizations. In addition to regular working meetings in Haiti, we pursue other coordination opportunities, such as the Haiti Key Players meeting, which will take place in New York on September 24, to be chaired by Under Secretary for Political Affairs William Burns.

Our response to the current crisis has been swift and decisive. On September 2, U.S. Ambassador Janet A. Sanderson issued a disaster declaration in response to Hurricane Gustav and resulting flooding throughout Haiti. To date, the USG has mobilized \$29.6 million for food, shelter, water, and relief activities in response to the current disaster.

- USAID/Haiti reprogrammed \$5 million in funds from development to humanitarian relief, to support immediate clean-up, rehabilitate damaged infrastructure, and undertake some flood prevention activities. To the extent feasible, these activities use labor-intensive methods, providing short-term jobs

and needed income to affected families to help them re-establish their livelihoods.

- USAID's Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA) is working to program a total of \$9.8 million for provision of non-food relief supplies, and programs addressing basic infrastructure needs, health, and water, sanitation, and hygiene. Facilitation of these interventions are being managed by a ten-member USAID Disaster Assistance Response Team (USAID/DART). To support the USAID/DART, USAID/OFDA has activated a Response Management Team (RMT) in Washington.
- On September 4, a USAID/OFDA-chartered aircraft arrived in Port au Prince, delivering USAID/OFDA emergency relief supplies including hygiene kits, ten-liter water containers, and rolls of plastic sheeting. Worth nearly \$335,000 including transport, the supplies were transported to affected areas with assistance from the U.S. Coast Guard and implementing partner International Organization for Migration (IOM).
- On September 11, a second USAID/OFDA-chartered aircraft arrived with additional ten-liter water containers, hygiene kits, and rolls of plastic sheeting, and 2 water bladders, valued at more than \$410,000, including transport.
- USAID/OFDA also authorized the deployment of a three-person Americas Support Team to Haiti to supplement the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination team based in Gonaïves.

- Additional USAID/OFDA contribution includes the following:
  - \$2 million for the short and medium term repair of bridges and roads to facilitate the movement and distribution of emergency relief supplies.
  - \$500,000 in funding to the American Red Cross logistical support and emergency relief supplies.
  - \$1.5 million to IOM for shelter and settlement projects, distribution of non-food assistance, as well as humanitarian coordination activities.
  - \$500,000 to the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) in response to PAHO's appeal to support the Government of Haiti and relief organizations with health activities, benefiting 10,000 people.
  - \$2 million to the United Nations World Food Program to augment logistical capacity for delivery of humanitarian aid.
  - \$750,000 to World Vision to support the distribution of non-food relief supplies and water, sanitation , and hygiene activities, benefiting nearly 70,000 people.
  
- In addition, USAID's Office of Food for Peace is providing \$14 million of P.L. 480 Title II emergency food aid to be provided through the United Nations World Food Program, World Vision, and Catholic Relief Services to respond to relief and recovery food aid needs in Haiti. These organizations were already covering approximately 90% of the Haitian territory with feeding programs, reaching 1.5 million of Haiti's poorest and most vulnerable citizens. The programs' coverage has been expanded to provide emergency feeding in additional areas impacted by the storms.
  
- The US Department of Defense has contributed \$1,021,660 as of September 22 to cover costs of emergency relief activities.

- The U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has deployed medical personnel to assist in setting up systems monitor for outbreaks of infectious diseases

As of September 16, we have transported 6872 metric tons of emergency food and relief commodities and over 99,000 liters of safe drinking water to meet the immediate needs of Haitians, in collaboration with our partners.

On September 5, U.S. Navy's 4th Fleet diverted the amphibious ship USS Kearsarge from Colombia to assist the Haitian people. On September 8, the USS Kearsarge arrived in Haiti, bringing urgently needed air and sealift capacity to transport relief aid to the flooded areas inaccessible by road. USS Kearsarge support to Haiti includes the movement of food, cargo and equipment between Port-au-Prince and Gonaives, Jeremie, Saint Marc, Port de Paix, Jacmel and Les Cayes. USAID/Haiti and USAID/OFDA are working closely with IOM, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the donors' water, sanitation, and hygiene cluster to identify logistics and transport options in order to provide water generated by the USS Kearsarge for populations without access to safe drinking water. The USS Kearsarge mission in Haiti, originally slated to last until September 13, has been extended.

In addition to providing logistics support for delivery of humanitarian assistance, engineers from the USS Kearsarge have joined with USAID/Haiti engineers to assess road conditions and damage to bridges, in order to discuss priority infrastructure interventions with the Government of Haiti. U.S. Department of Defense engineers are working closely with the Government of Haiti Ministry of



Public Works, Transport, and Communication to provide technical advice and conduct research in order to clarify the Ministry's identified infrastructure needs.

MINUSTAH are providing security and logistics support to ongoing humanitarian efforts.

The Center for International Disaster Information, is actively reaching out to the Haitian Diaspora and other organizations or individuals to assist in channeling humanitarian donations to those most affected by this disaster.

We are joining with the Haitian Diaspora to participate in Haiti's recovery and creation of livelihoods, by committing an initial \$2 million to leverage Diaspora investments in small and medium business enterprises in Haiti. USAID's contribution will serve as a catalyst to mobilize other donor and private sector contributions to this initiative.

### *Where Are We Going?*

USAID is currently in the emergency relief phase of our response. Looking ahead, we see significant needs in the flood affected zones of Haiti in the reconstruction and recovery phase in five critical areas:

**Repair Public Infrastructure.** There is a strong need to stimulate economic activity and help resume public services, preferably utilizing manual labor to allow Haitian families to receive immediate infusions of cash to temporarily offset lost livelihoods. This includes rebuilding schools and clinics; road and small bridge repair; and water and sanitation systems restoration.

**Help Restore Public Services.** In addition to repairing physical damage to schools, health clinics, and other public buildings, the restoration of public services will require replacing damaged or ruined equipment and medical and school supplies.

**Support Small Business, Producers, Farms and Families.** Self-help and income generation programs could provide a means to help small businesses recover. This includes micro-loans; seeds, tools, and livestock distribution; and support for families.

**Watershed Stabilization and Repair.** Assistance is required to support the restoration of agricultural production through irrigation repair and flood control; stabilize weak hillsides to prevent further damage to agricultural and transportation systems; and strengthen water user associations.

**Improve Disaster Mitigation Capacity.** National and local governments and community groups need support in reducing disaster vulnerability through better planning, risk assessment, and preparedness measures.

### ***Conclusions***

The U.S. is using its wide-ranging assistance resources to help Haiti recover from this disaster. We remain firmly committed to helping one of our closest neighbors during this difficult time.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement. I welcome any questions that you and other Members of the Subcommittee may have. Thank you.