

**Statement of Yvette D. Clarke**  
**Member of Congress (NY-11)**  
**House Committee on Foreign Affairs**  
**Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere**  
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**Situation on the ground**

Before Tropical Storm Fay, Hurricane Gustav, Hurricane Hanna and Hurricane Ike blew ashore, Haiti was experiencing incredibly difficult times. As the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, 80% of Haitians were living in poverty, with more than half living in abject poverty. Haiti already had the lowest standard of living on this side of the globe and hunger was widespread. Then the quick succession of four major storms over the span of three weeks turned an already bad situation worse.

According to USAID, 850,000 people in Haiti have been affected by these storms. Thus far, USAID estimates that 423 people have been killed and 50 remain missing. Over 150,000 people have been displaced and almost 50,000 homes were damaged or destroyed. Of the 850,000 people affected by the storms, the World Health Organization estimates that 442,000 are women, 24,000 are pregnant women, and 306,000 are children. These are people who were vulnerable before the storms and are now even more so.

I had the opportunity to travel to Haiti on September 12 following Hurricane Ike with my colleagues Reps. Kendrick Meek and Donna Edwards to assess the situation on the ground. We saw extraordinary damage there caused by flooding when we flew over Gonaives and Artibonite. People in Gonaives were living on their roofs as water was still rushing through their neighborhoods. In places where the water had receded, two to four feet of thick mud was left behind. In Artibonite, dead livestock were floating in the same water the people were using to bath in. Haiti is a country in crisis right now. President Rene Preval told us, "This is Katrina in the entire country, but without the means that Louisiana had."

The United States is doing a tremendous job assisting Haiti in their recovery following the recent storms. The amount of United States humanitarian assistance given to Haiti is approaching \$30 million. The USS Kearsarge is docked in Port au Prince and is serving as a logistical and medical staging area. U.S. military personnel and other officials are doing much of the heavy lifting there in terms of the recovery and I was proud to have the opportunity to meet with them while we were there. The USS Kearsarge recently extended their mission for as long as they are needed in the region, which is good news, because there is much more that needs to be done.

To further illustrate how much of a challenge the recovery efforts will be, this past week Haiti experienced heavy rains, which endangers recovery efforts. There are also ten more weeks left in the Atlantic Hurricane Season and I am fearful of what Mother Nature has in store for Haiti in the coming weeks. I am hopeful though, that the recovery effort in Haiti can keep ahead of any storms to come. We can assist by reinforcing Haiti's infrastructure and putting in place an early warning system in the near future to reduce the loss of life and damage to the country.

## **Rebuilding Infrastructure**

Haiti's infrastructure is the number one issue facing the country right now. The president, prime minister and ambassador emphasized this point to us in meetings in Haiti and Washington. Eight of the country's ten geographic regions were flooded. The floodwaters washed away roads and bridges, isolating parts of the country. Many roads and bridges are still impassable, weeks after the latest storm hit.

While the infrastructure needs to be rebuilt, emergency measures need to be taken immediately. Haiti needs temporary bridges to reach areas isolated by floods, like Gonaives. Emergency aid cannot get to the people who need it unless there are bridges. I cannot stress enough how important it is for Haiti to receive temporary emergency bridges.

After the emergency measures have been taken and the most pressing needs of the people met, Haiti can then take this opportunity to rebuild in a sustainable way. There will be hurricanes in the future, and it is likely that they will be more powerful than ever seen before. We, as Haiti's neighbor, need to help our neighbor transition into a future of stability and prosperity. But Haiti will continue to be ravaged by external factors, like hurricanes and food prices, unless they can rebuild their infrastructure. Roads and bridges need to be built to last – they need to survive mudslides and flooding. Floodwalls and levies could hold back rising waters and protect low-lying areas. The forests need to be replanted, so the topsoil will hold the rainwater and prevent flooding. The people of Haiti need clean water and modern sewage systems.

Haiti cannot rebuild its infrastructure with an eye to the future without help. We can provide Haiti with the assistance to do so, not only with monetary support, but with the expertise of our agencies. If we commit to helping Haiti in this way, we can be sure that we will not see the destruction on the same level that we have seen in Haiti during the last decade.

## **Food Crisis**

In 2008, the perfect storm of high energy costs and commodity expenses erupted in a food crisis in Haiti. People rioted because of widespread hunger, and many people were forced to start eating mud cakes to stave off the hunger. Because much of Haiti's food is imported, the country is especially vulnerable to world commodity prices, which have skyrocketed in recent months.

The rice crop was especially important to Haiti and just before it was time to harvest the crop, it was wiped out when the storms hit the country. When we visited Haiti we flew over Artibonite, where many of these crops are grown, we saw widespread destruction and the loss of not only rice crops, but mangos and plantains as well. These rice crops were destroyed at the worst possible time: when the country was looking forward to an influx of food and after Haiti's farmers had already invested the capital in the crop. Next season's rice crop is now in danger as well, because the farmers do not have the means to invest in the next crop.

The crop losses Haiti experienced leaves the country even more heavily dependent on foreign imports, as prices around the world continue to rise. At markets throughout Haiti, prices for basic food have more than doubled since the storms hit.

Haitian farmers are especially vulnerable to natural disasters like the ones we have seen in the last month. The United States needs to help Haiti strengthen its agricultural sector, a part of the economy that two-thirds of all Haitians depend on.

### **Political Instability**

This past April, the rising cost of food in Haiti led to political unrest. Riots broke out and killed seven people, including a U.N. Peacekeeper. The riots collapsed the government and led to the dismissal of Prime Minister Jacques Edouard Alexis from office.

Haiti was without a head of government from April until September 5, 2008, when the new prime minister was installed after months of deadlock. Prime Minister Michele Pierre-Louis came into office in the midst of this disaster and has admitted that she is in a vulnerable situation. She fears she may be forced from office unless her country receives more help. Haiti needs a stable government to lead the country out of its prolonged crisis and this government needs the backing of the United States to stabilize.

### **Immigration Issues**

The Haitian Diaspora has brought over 450,000 Haitians to our country, including about 200,000 who are not citizens. Over 47,000 of my constituents of my district in Brooklyn, NY are of Haitian descent or came to Brooklyn directly from Haiti. The remittances these immigrants send back to their homeland account for nearly a quarter of Haiti's gross domestic product (GDP). That is more than double what the country earns from exports.

One thing the United States can do to immediately help our neighbor stabilize is grant Haitians living in the U.S. Temporary Protected Status (TPS). TPS would allow Haitians living in the U.S. to work legally so they can send money back home.

TPS can be granted when a foreign state requests it because it is unable to handle the return of its nationals because of a natural disaster and Haiti certainly qualifies. President Rene Preval wrote to President Bush in February requesting him to grant Haitians TPS to help his country recover from storms that hit in previous years, like Tropical Storm Noel in 2007 and Hurricane Jeanne in 2004. President Preval explained to the President Bush that TPS, "would enable my government to concentrate its limited resources upon economic and political reconstruction instead of having to provide social services to (deportees)." TPS can also be granted to a country if there are temporary and extraordinary circumstances on the ground that prevent aliens from returning, another condition that Haiti satisfies.

TPS is not a pathway to citizenship or permanent residency – it is exactly as its name would imply – temporary. When TPS expires when the situation on the ground in the country is more stable, the status aliens in our country changes and they can return home or face deportation. There is a long history of granting TPS to countries after they face natural disasters: in 2001

President Bush granted TPS to Salvadorans after earthquakes hit their country. Haiti's current natural disaster is compounded by the instability the country was already facing because of extreme poverty and food insecurity. Granting TPS is the most inexpensive and immediate forms of aid we can extend to Haiti.

Whether or not the administration chooses to grant Haitian's TPS, we need to immediately halt deportations to Haiti from the U.S. It is unconscionable that we would choose to send an individual back to his home country when it is facing such a dire situation. It is a burden on the home country, which is trying to stabilize, and dangerous to the person facing deportation. I want to take this opportunity to call on Attorney General Michael Mukasey to immediately grant Haitians relief from deportations by granting them deferred enforced departure (DED).

### **Emergency Appropriations**

I join my colleagues in requesting an emergency appropriation for \$300 million for disaster assistance in Haiti before Congress adjourns. In a letter to Speaker Pelosi, one of Haiti's champions, Rep. Maxine Waters, explained, "Haiti is already the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. It does not have the capacity to respond to the widespread death and destruction caused by the storms of this magnitude. Immediate assistance from the United States is critical to meet the emergency needs of the Haitian people and to begin to rebuild damaged homes and infrastructure."

### **Homeland Security**

As is the case with all countries around the globe, there is a strong correlation between America's security and the events occurring in neighboring countries just outside our borders. Sitting just off the coast of Florida, Haiti has long been an ally to the U.S., and is a partner on issues relating to drug interdiction and human smuggling. Because of its sizable population and proximity, Haiti has an important role in the future of a successful Third Border Initiative, ensuring that the Caribbean does not act as a portal into the U.S. from the outside world for those who wish to do us harm.

Our ability to have an effective partnership with Haiti to address these issues is dependent on having stability both within the government and within the greater society. During my recent trip to Haiti, I became greatly concerned that if things continue as they are without the support of our government, the country could potentially fall into a state of unrest that would both complicate our relationship with their government and breed the type of conditions that can lead to increased levels of international organized crime.

Another growing concern which may have a serious impact on our border security is the prospect of a mass Haitian migration caused by further natural disasters or worsening conditions on the island. Because Haiti is so close to American waters this is a possibility and, in fact, there is precedent for such an event, as the Coast Guard routinely finds Haitian refugees on boats and rafts attempting to make their way to Florida. While the Coast Guard has planned for the possibility of a mass Haitian migration of tens-of-thousands, this would create a very difficult situation for the Department of Homeland Security and could dramatically impact people in our

coastal communities and in places like New York, which attracts high levels of Haitian immigrants. Therefore, speaking as a member of the House Committee on Homeland Security, I believe it is in America's best interest to ensure that stability is maintained in Haiti.

### **Third Border Initiative**

According to the Congressional Research Service, The Third Border Initiative (TBI) was introduced by President George W. Bush during the Third Summit of the Americas in Quebec City in April 2001, as a valuable framework for structuring our engagement across the broad spectrum of matters that affect the prosperity and well-being of the region and its peoples. The Bush Administration developed the Third Border Initiative in order to better focus the U.S.-Caribbean relationship and work with our partners on a number of capacity building tasks. The initiative recognizes the special significance of the Caribbean as an important partner of the United States and the Caribbean. The Third Border Initiative will strengthen the ability of Caribbean institutions to address social and economic problems, combat transnational crime, and promote regional security. Brian Nichols, director of State's Office of Caribbean Affairs, pointed to the "Third Border Initiative," established by the United States in 2001, as an example of U.S.-Caribbean cooperation in dealing with potential terrorist threats.

The objective of the Third Border Initiative is to focus U.S.-Caribbean engagement through targeted programs that comprise both new and ongoing activities designed to enhance cooperation in the diplomatic, security, economic, environmental, health, and education arenas without prejudice to additional areas of collaboration that may be agreed upon in the future. The Third Border Initiative provides the opportunity to focus funding and assistance on those areas where we see the greatest increased need.

Through TBI assistance, the United States will help Caribbean governments prepare for natural disasters through technical improvements to the region's disaster early warning and communication systems and ensure that disaster risk reduction and mitigation concepts are explicitly integrated into the regions economic planning and implementation. TBI funds will also help smaller economies move toward greater competitiveness by assisting targeted business sectors in the region meet the requirements for successful participation in the global marketplace.

The TBI must be fully funded and I have introduced a resolution to express how important it is for the TBI to be fully funded.

Thank you.