

**ECOSOC informal transition event**  
**13 July 2010**

**Panel: Haiti recovery and transition**  
**Comments by Nigel Fisher, DSRSG/RC/HC ai, United Nations, Haiti**

For the last week, the world's media has once again turned its spotlight onto Haiti. With some notable exceptions, the predominant narrative has been predetermined by the assumption that nothing, or too little, has happened since 12 January: why has more not been done, why are over one million displaced still in camps, why is recovery so slow – slow related to what acceptable rate of speed is not defined.

One thing is agreed; Haiti is in a period of transition. But about what transition are we talking?

- Is it the transition in focus from providing the basics of life to the displaced in camps, to supporting them to return home or to alternative, more durable shelter?
- Is it the transition from expenditure on humanitarian needs to investment in recovery?
- Is it the need to exponentially accelerate the removal of debris?

The answer is yes to all of the above, but there are many more transitional challenges that that Haiti is facing:

- Is it the transition of the majority of Haitians out of grinding poverty and illiteracy?
- The transition of Haiti out of environmental disaster?
- Out of agricultural collapse and food import dependency to economic growth and development?
- Out of metropolitan Port au Port as Haiti's single development centre to more equitable country-wide recovery?
- Out of state weakness to state effectiveness?
- Out of the politics of personality to the politics of vision for Haiti's future?

Again, it is yes to all the above and much more. The focus on the immediate plight of Haitians displaced by the earthquake and on the debris which still litters the earthquake in the affected areas is urgent and necessary. Haitians need homes. Acceleration of the removal of rubble is probably the single most important priority so that reconstruction of housing and infrastructure can begin.

On the other hand, the dire challenges facing the poorest country in the hemisphere did not begin with the earthquake and cannot be solved in six months.

Comparisons are always facile and sometimes dangerous, but it may be worth recalling that in the countries of Central America, where the 1998 Hurricane Mitch took the lives of an

estimated 8,000 people, it took approximately five years for full recovery for the countries affected – all with a stronger base of economic and social development than Haiti.

The 7.2 magnitude earthquake that struck Kobe in Japan in 1995 claimed the lives of 6,400 and left 300,000 homeless. Notwithstanding Japan's advanced level of development, it took seven years for Kobe to recover to the social infrastructure and economic productivity levels that had existed prior to the earthquake.

The 12 January earthquake was an acute natural disaster that hit a fragile state already enmeshed in a series of chronic and intractable development challenges. The extensive loss of life was not just due to size of the earthquake itself, huge though it was. It was also attributable to the grinding poverty that led Haitians to migrate to seek opportunities in the only real development region in Haiti – metropolitan Port-au-Prince. It was attributable to poor quality construction materials and methods, to lack of building standards and regulation. Poor infrastructure hampered relief efforts.

Yet in retrospect, the Haiti and the international community did move rapidly to respond to the immediate humanitarian crisis; the homeless and displaced are housed in tented camps and sites from Port-au-Prince to Leogane to Jacmel; they receive water and health care on a regular basis. The airport was quickly reopened, as are the port and schools now. Port-au-Prince is a hive of activity as Haitians go about the daily process of earning a living.

And it is worth recalling that prior to 12 January and after the change of government in 2004, there had been several consecutive years of economic growth. MINUSTAH, the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti, had contributed to maintaining security. Improvements in the capacity and training of the Haitian National Police had contributed to greater public safety and a fragile but stable security situation. Improvements in public administration, especially in financial administration, were beginning.... Reminders that post-earthquake security and growth are indeed possible, especially if the international community stays the course with Haiti.

The Government had articulated its strategy for economic growth, social development and improved governance in its 2007 *Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper*. And on March 31 this year, here at the United Nations, the Haitian Government launched its post-earthquake *Action Plan for National Recovery and Development of Haiti*.

Haiti has had no shortage of development plans over the last decade. An immediate challenge is to turn the current Action Plan into an operational plan with time-bound targets against which progress can be measured. The newly formed Interim Commission for Haitian Recovery, working with sectoral ministries, the international community and hopefully, with Haitian civil society and international non-governmental organizations, will be addressing this challenge in the coming weeks.

The devastation unleashed by the earthquake – and wreaked by hurricanes - has further weakened an economy already shackled by lack of investment capital and skilled labour. But the response to post-earthquake Haiti cannot be economic alone. Economic underdevelopment and weakness contribute to political and social problems, to corruption. Poverty and social underdevelopment increases political volatility and insecurity. These combine to weaken Haiti's political and administrative institutions. So as we look to Haitian transition, we have to address together these interlinked economic, social, security, political and institutional problems. A few remarks on these interlinked priorities:

### **Economic development**

Displaced Haitians in their tent cities, when asked what is most important for them, most often cite two issues above all others: jobs and schools.

Generating economic growth is a primary challenge for this poorest of countries in the Western hemisphere. Recapitalization of an earthquake-devastated private sector is a priority, with a special emphasis on small and medium enterprises. If business investment is to grow, issues of property rights, land title and the now very complex matter of registering a business require urgent attention.

In an economy dominated by only one major development centre, the Port-au-Prince area, “deconcentration” - the stimulation of economic development in locations other than the Metropolitan area – is essential, as is regeneration of sustainable agriculture and agro-based enterprise. Women form a majority of heads of household of Haiti's impoverished families and of the rural poor. Thus stimulating economic opportunities for women through micro-credit and other means will enhance their economic status, enable them to keep their families together and invest in the health and education of their children.

### **Education and health care**

The pre-earthquake education system in Haiti, if it can be called a system, was characterised by poor quality and learning achievement, lack of access – half of Haiti's school-age population and three-quarters of rural children were not in school – inconsistent standards and little regulation or oversight. Very few children actually completed even a basic education. Private providers dominate the education system. On 12 January, some 1,000 teachers and 40,000 school children died. More than 80 per cent of school buildings in Port-au-Prince were destroyed. Concentrated in the earthquake zone, almost 90% of Haiti's institutions of higher learning were wiped out.

Today, in a Haiti with very little capacity to increase the provision of public schooling, the principal challenges are to increase access and to improve the quality of teachers and teaching methods. Does this mean increased public schooling? Let me return to that question in a minute, after touching on health care.

Mortality and morbidity rates from eminently preventable diseases are the worst in the hemisphere and worse than many developing countries elsewhere. HIV/AIDS has reached epidemic proportions. Some 4 in 10 Haitians have no access to health care, whether one is speaking of proximity or financial capacity to access such care. Again, rural populations are the worst off. The Ministry of Health has little capacity for actual service delivery and most such care is provided by non-governmental or private providers.

In education and health care, it is unrealistic to think that the state will have the capacity to provide extensive services in the near future. The providers will be the private sector and NGOs. The likely most practicable way to proceed is for the international community to support investment in the expansion and capacities of staff of both the education and health ministries to develop sector policies and standards of service delivery, oversee and regulate private providers. This will require subsidization of private providers so that fees for the poorest can be waived or strictly capped; it will require performance-based contracts with providers and a gradual whittling away of providers that fail to meet reasonable standards.

### **Public administration**

This cannot be done without a strengthened and restructured public administration, the foundation of a more effective state, but which has been too often ignored by the international community. Following the earthquake, the international community has acknowledged that investment in building the long-term effectiveness of state institutions, along with investment in poverty-reduction and economic opportunity, must be part of the package. This means investment in properly-trained and managed personnel, in planning, budgeting and execution of policy decisions, in administrative and civil service reform.

### **Justice, security and the rule of law**

The often volatile security situation in Haiti has been exacerbated by the challenges faced by the state in asserting its authority. Despite progress in recent years in institutional development and reform of the Haitian National Police, in recruitment practices and training, “the HNP still lacks the capacity to respond effectively to internal security threats without external support”. MINUSTAH peacekeepers and UNPOL support will be needed for some time to support the provision of public security and to continue reform of the HNP, the capacity of which was weakened by loss of life and infrastructure on 12 January.

The challenge is exacerbated by the deep weakness of the justice system; courts do not apply the law, accused languish in jail without trial and without access to legal advice; prison conditions are atrocious; relations between the police and justice system are poor. From vastly improving case management, to accelerated pretrial detainee review, to prison construction, to property dispute resolution mechanisms, to addressing birth, death and identity registration – especially in post-earthquake Haiti where so many records have been lost: these are all critical areas requiring sustained international assistance.

## **Conclusion**

This quick review is by no means complete – many issues are not covered.

While the plight of the displaced in the earthquake-affected regions areas of Haiti is dramatic and demands urgent attention and investment, recovery and transition in Haiti is about much more than their immediate needs. If we address only the immediate needs of the displaced and then forget Haiti, we will have only stuck a band aid on a patient suffering chronic and deep-seated health problems.

Only sustained action to stimulate broad, sustainable economic recovery; to significantly increasing access to –and regulation of – health, education and other social services for Haiti’s poverty-stricken majority; to public administration reform; and to the rule of law through reform of the justice system and strengthening of public security; only sustained action in these closely-intertwined fields can transform Haiti.

Transformation is what is required. Building back better or re-construction is insufficient.

Taking Haiti back to where it was on the morning of 12 January is not what will best serve either Haitian citizens or their leaders.

