

Security Council Open Debate on the Situation in Haiti

6 April 2011

"Many hands make light work." This is the Creole proverb with which Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos Calderon began the Security Council Open Debate on the Haitian situation on April 6, 2011. The situation in Haiti still represents a major concern for the international community after the devastating earthquake of January 12, 2010 that ravaged the island of the Greater Antilles and caused more than 220,000 casualties. Colombia, currently president of the Council, chose to highlight the situation in Haiti with an Open Debate.

The delegates discussed the measures that were recently implemented by the international community and the UN and their positive and negative impacts. It was pointed out that as hurricane season approaches, 680,000 people are still living in makeshift tents. As such, the debate to improve the dynamic stabilization and establishment of the rule of law in Haiti has become an indispensable priority for the international agenda.

Most delegations agreed that the United Nations Mission for Stabilization in Haiti (MINUSTAH) has worked successfully with the invaluable assistance of Brazil and Argentina and the extraordinary dedication of Edmond Mulet, head of MINUSTAH. Rene Preval, the out-going president of Haiti, also addressed the Council and described the situation of the country as precarious in terms of both health and social issues. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon highlighted that much more needs to be done with regards to health and social issues. Moreover, Ban Ki-moon, Bill Clinton, and nine foreign ministers of Spain and Latin American countries agree that the international community must act now and change its tactics. It was pointed out that the international community must move from the logic of emergency assistance to logic of real development. None of the country's ambitions will be realized unless men and women of Haiti are given the resources to make changes themselves and provided the opportunity to become the real protagonists of their own destiny. Building peace is not about dependency and assistance.

In addition, many areas of important concern, such as respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, remain unresolved. There also remain sexual violence facing women and girls. The abysmal record of the judiciary system and prisons, still overcrowded and not in accord with the minimum standards required by international treaties and covenants, is another important concern. Furthermore, government spending still lacks sorely of transparency, which ultimately prevents foreign investment. But even if challenges are

colossal, they are achievable. Much progress has been observed, including health advances surrounding the cholera pandemic that has been contained.

Priorities for rebuilding and stabilizing Haiti were underscored. Some delegations advocated for an emphasis on removal of rubble in order to rebuild, which would simultaneously create employment. Secondly, there was a call to create an effective public service with access to basic services and establish an efficient rule of law. With adequate rule of law, the transparency of the government could be improved in order to manage thousands of dollars that needs to be used for reconstruction. Special Envoy Clinton suggested focusing first on rebuilding the country by using the rich resources of its biomass to build a new ecologically sustainable and self-sufficient habitat and, secondly, to increase the number of civilian personnel working in Haiti, including engineers and architects. Mary Flores, Honduras's representative, called for a cancellation of Haiti's external debt, which rose, before the earthquake, to nearly 12% of its GDP. Paulette Bethel, Bahamas's representative, promoted the idea of establishing a preventive system against earthquakes, similar to the experience in Japan, which deals with both construction standards and adequate response mechanisms.

These are ambitious and interesting priorities for which the earliest possible implementation is necessary. Although the country's recovery potential is considerable, the reality on the ground is still chaotic. Only 20% of 10 millions of cubic meters of rubble from the earthquake have been removed. This highlights a cruel fact: the road to reconstruction is extremely long. It will take years, even decades. Yes, many hands are needed, but together the international community can lighten Haiti's burden.