

February 17, 2011

The President of the United States of America  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue  
Washington DC, 20500

Dear Mr. President,

Thank you for your leadership in maintaining the vital U.S. commitment to provide much needed resources, including funding, to the island nation of Haiti. While we witness the recovery phase slowly unfold, we remain deeply concerned about significant gaps in the protection of women and girls. As the incidence of gang violence increases within the internally displaced person (IDP) camps, we urge that measures ensuring that protection issues, especially those relating to sexual and gender based violence (SGBV), the phenomenon of “transactional sex” and the plight of Restavèk children (child slaves), be given priority attention in the recovery and reconstruction of the island nation. We urge you to increase U.S. economic pressure on the Government of Haiti, international organizations and non-governmental organizations to fast track and streamline their efforts to help improve security and services for women and girls, and to ensure that women and girls are equal participants in near term and longer term reconstruction efforts.

Women and girls continue to face great risks in displacement sites that are severely overcrowded, and many still lack adequate lighting and security. As you may be aware, there have been numerous accounts of women and girls being robbed, harassed or assaulted when attempting to get food, other aid back to their families, using the latrines or while in their tarpaulin tents. There is often no safe way to report these crimes. Medical and psychosocial services for survivors of sexual assault are insufficient. The overall vulnerability of displaced women and young girls remains particularly troubling.

We strongly believe that the following are crucial to mitigating the risk of SGBV against Haitian women and girls, and are vital to ensuring the gender equity necessary to establish a thriving sovereign nation:

- Prioritize the safety and wellbeing of women and girls throughout the relief assistance efforts in Haiti by supporting community-based anti-violence campaigns. This includes training and the provision of basic resources requested by the communities. For example, community-based organizations like FAVILEK and KOFAVIV, started by rape victims who provide services for rape victims. These organizations are in dire need of financial and material resources.
- Supply safer temporary shelter for women and girls within the IDP camps that provide better protection against intrusion, assault and rape.
- Strongly advocate for the improvement of communication between Haitian grassroots groups that are poised to deliver social services and the UN Cluster system, IHRC, Haiti Reconstruction Fund, INGO's and International Donors. This includes Kreyòl translation and resources in all UN Cluster meetings, news reports, assessments and communications.

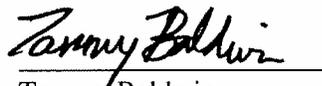
- Develop a comprehensive security plan that addresses urgent needs and identifies steps that in the long-term will rebuild security structures in Haiti. The plan should be developed in consultation with women's groups and address the roles that different security actors play as follows:
  - Support camp committees to enhance security at the community-level. To fulfill this role, these committees must be accountable to and representative of their communities with equal participation of women and the youth, particularly adolescent girls.
  - Continue to strongly support the Government of Haiti in its effort to reconstitute its police force in ways that ensure these institutions are responsive to gender-based violence. This includes recruiting more women and reconstituting the units that were trained on gender-based violence.
  - Continue to ensure that MINUSTAH, in close coordination with HNP, the Protection Cluster, the GBV sub-cluster, and the Government of Haiti, continue to provide security support to those areas where the problems are most acute.
- Establish more sexual and reproductive health services, including mental health services, for survivors of physical and sexual violence, and increase information campaigns so that communities know how to locate and access these services free of charge. In addition, implement response mechanisms that provide support for survivors, and enhance the monitoring, reporting and the prosecution of human rights violations;
- Guarantee women's full participation and leadership in all phases of the reconstruction of Haiti as mandated by UN Council Resolution 1325 and other internationally recognized standards.
- Sustain support for and strengthen the capacity of the Ministry for Women's Affairs and other ministries with responsibilities under the National Plan to monitor and promote better coordination and provision of services among all actors, so that gaps are addressed in a more timely fashion, communities are fully engaged in the response, and citizens are better informed on how to access essential services.
- Mitigate the occurrence of rape and "transactional sex" by encouraging women's economic empowerment through vocational skills training, job placement, and access to microfinance opportunities in order to enable women to be independent. Ensure that women and girls have full access to cash-for-work programs tailored to their income and protection needs;
- Outlaw the Restavèk practice, which deprives children of their family environment and violates their most basic rights, such as the rights to education, health, and food as well as subjecting them to multiple forms of abuse including economic exploitation, sexual violence and corporal punishment, and violating their fundamental right to protection from all forms of violence. Many have been reported as trafficked within and outside the country;
- Ensure that there are regular assessments and monitoring of gender needs and capacity in all sectors and in all phases of recovery and reconstruction.

It is of the utmost importance for all parties engaged in this humanitarian response and reconstruction efforts to significantly improve their outreach to women and girls. Near term and longer term assistance programs will only be effective if women and girls are fully engaged as equal partners in program assessment, design, and implementation. As you know, there is a vibrant network of women's

organizations in Haiti. Their involvement is critical to the successful reconstruction of Haiti and to the development of a society that offers equal protection and opportunity to all its citizens. We look forward to working with you on these important issues, and to receiving regular reports on the progress that is being made to address them.

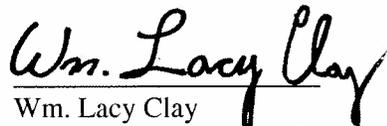
Sincerely,

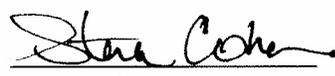
  
Yvette D. Clarke  
Member of Congress

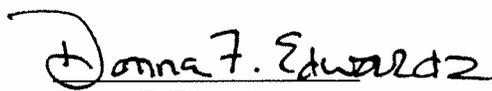
  
Tammy Baldwin  
Member of Congress

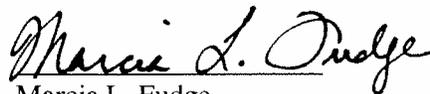
  
Corrine Brown  
Member of Congress

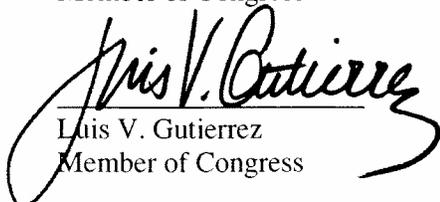
  
Andre Carson  
Member of Congress

  
Wm. Lacy Clay  
Member of Congress

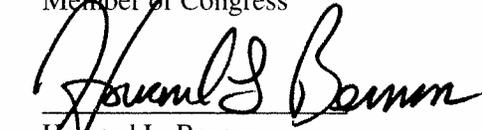
  
Steve Cohen  
Member of Congress

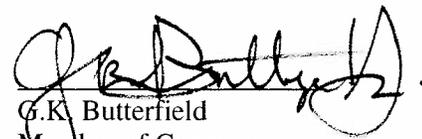
  
Donna F. Edwards  
Member of Congress

  
Marcia L. Fudge  
Member of Congress

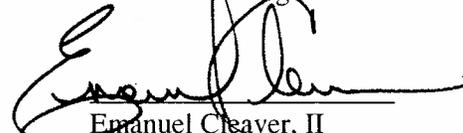
  
Luis V. Gutierrez  
Member of Congress

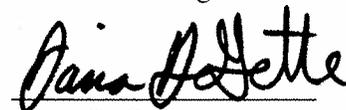
  
Frederica S. Wilson  
Member of Congress

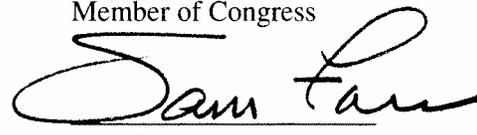
  
Howard L. Berman  
Member of Congress

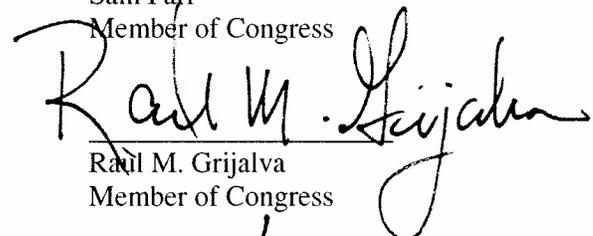
  
G.K. Butterfield  
Member of Congress

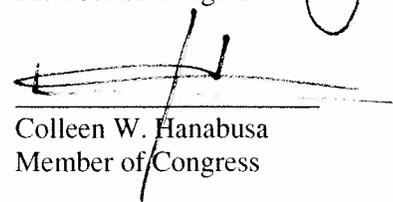
  
Hansen Clarke  
Member of Congress

  
Emanuel Cleaver, II  
Member of Congress

  
Diana DeGette  
Member of Congress

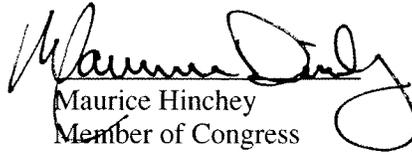
  
Sam Farr  
Member of Congress

  
Raul M. Grijalva  
Member of Congress

  
Colleen W. Hanabusa  
Member of Congress



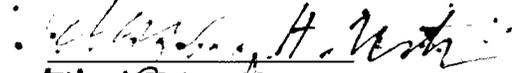
Alcee L. Hastings  
Member of Congress



Maurice Hinchey  
Member of Congress



Mazie K. Hirono  
Member of Congress



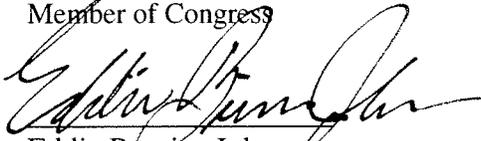
Eleanor Holmes Norton  
Member of Congress



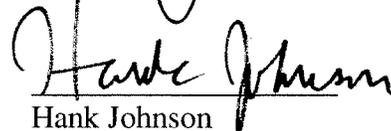
Jessie L. Jackson, Jr.  
Member of Congress



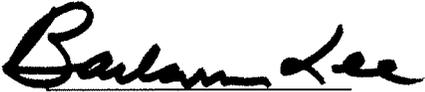
Sheila Jackson-Lee  
Member of Congress



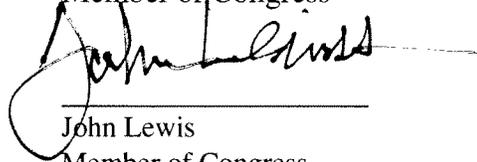
Eddie Bernice Johnson  
Member of Congress



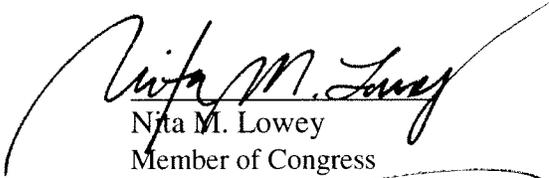
Hank Johnson  
Member of Congress



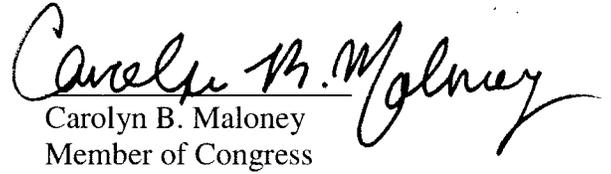
Barbara Lee  
Member of Congress



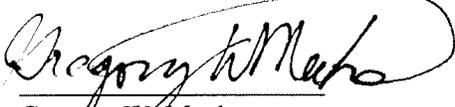
John Lewis  
Member of Congress



Nita M. Lowey  
Member of Congress



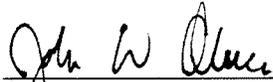
Carolyn B. Maloney  
Member of Congress



Gregory W. Meeks  
Member of Congress



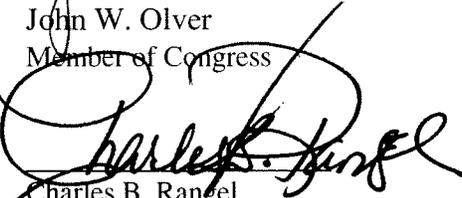
James P. Moran  
Member of Congress



John W. Olver  
Member of Congress



Donald M. Payne  
Member of Congress



Charles B. Rangel  
Member of Congress



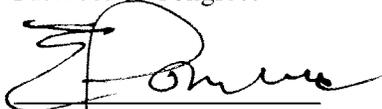
Laura Richardson  
Member of Congress



Cedric L. Richmond  
Member of Congress



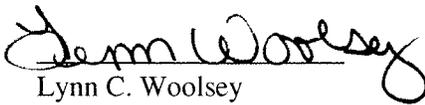
Fortney "Pete" Stark  
Member of Congress



Edolphus "Ed" Towns  
Member of Congress



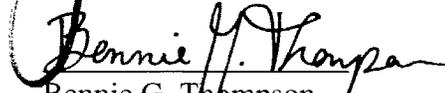
Maxine Waters  
Member of Congress



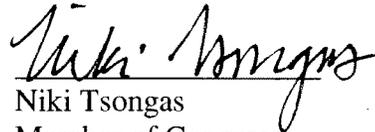
Lynn C. Woolsey  
Member of Congress



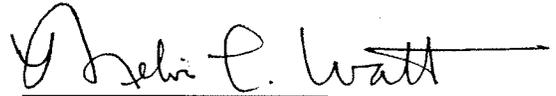
Jan Schakowsky  
Member of Congress



Bennie G. Thompson  
Member of Congress



Niki Tsongas  
Member of Congress



Melvin L. Watt  
Member of Congress



Debbie Wasserman Schultz  
Member of Congress

Cc:

Secretary Hillary R. Clinton, U.S. Department of State  
Ambassador Susan E. Rice, U.S. Mission to the United Nations