

Message of the Haitian Episcopal Conference Gathered in Plenary Session with Invited Church Representatives

The people of Haiti continue to experience the devastating consequences of last January's earthquake. We gather as Church leaders from Haiti and various parts of the world united through the bonds of solidarity and love for the people of Haiti. As Haitians continue to struggle to recover from this unprecedented natural disaster, the Church walks with them, bearing the cross of Christ, in hope that such suffering will give way to new life and to a new Haiti.

The bonds of solidarity demonstrated through the tremendous outpouring of prayer and support from people throughout the world in the immediate aftermath of the quake have remained strong in the weeks and months since. The Church, *Caritas Internationalis* and other Catholic partners have raised approximately \$300 million in financial commitments to date. With these funds, Caritas Haiti and partners in Haiti have distributed food to over 900,000 people, and continue to provide food, water, sanitation, shelter materials and health and protection services for hundreds of thousands throughout the country. These actions should be added to the massive work of solidarity among parishes, dioceses, religious congregations throughout the world that have reached out in love to our brothers and sisters in Haiti. Through the grace of God and the selfless efforts of countless people, our worst fears about disease and civil unrest horrifically compounding the initial disaster did not become reality. We continue to give thanks for such generosity as we pray for all benefactors.

[Complete Human Development]

As Pope Benedict XVI reminds us, *everything has its origin in God's love, everything is shaped by it, everything is directed towards it.*¹ The Church itself embodies God's love and fulfills her mission by promoting the fullness of the human person² who stands at the center of a new Haiti. More than food and shelter; chapels and schools; clinics and convents, we aim to build up every Haitian man and woman in his or her totality: physically, intellectually, emotionally and spiritually. If our work does not involve the whole person and every person, it is not true development.³ This then is our goal: integral human development.

Stubborn obstacles, exacerbated by the earthquake, continue to block the path towards integral human development. For the millions of Haitians displaced by the earthquake, there remain logistical and other seemingly insurmountable problems in accessing food, reliable shelter and sources of sustainable income. These factors underline the need for urgent action and competent and responsible leadership at all levels. Without such leadership, the well-being of those who continue to suffer will not receive sufficient attention.

¹ Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 2

² Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Hominis*, 14

³ *Caritas in Veritate*, 18

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[Haiti First but in Collaboration]

Lasting solutions can only emerge through genuine collaboration. As protagonists in their own development, Haitians themselves should take responsibility for leading recovery efforts and setting the priorities for building the new Haiti. Active participation by all, especially those most affected by the devastation, is vital to solve the long-term development needs of Haiti. If Haitian leadership is not forthcoming, truly sustainable development will be unattainable. The whole Church, whose international presence is symbolized through this unique gathering, remains committed to assist in whatever ways are deemed most helpful to the Church in Haiti. The Church in Haiti, on the other hand, has welcomed this accompaniment for the good of the Haitian people in a spirit of mutual love and respect.

[Partnership]

In addition to the continued need for humanitarian relief and development interventions, of particular concern is the nature and quality of rebuilding efforts. Haiti still needs the schools and clinics, chapels and community centers which were operated and owned by the Church and which have contributed greatly to the common good for generations. In undertaking any re-building of this Church-run network, we will ensure that any and all building will adhere to the appropriate standards. In this regard, we call upon all those interested in contributing to the rebuilding of Haiti to do so in a coordinated and transparent way with due regard for the importance of local decision-making in developing and implementing an overall plan of recovery. Common action that is planned and transparently financed will offer the surest way to providing accountability in the stewardship of limited resources. In due course, we will establish specific structures to undertake this work accompanied by new guidelines for partnerships between the Church in Haiti and other Church entities from around the world.

The task ahead remains formidable. Nonetheless, an important step has been taken through the creation of PROCHE-an organization designed to rebuild the Church's infrastructure according to accepted standards. As the recovery and development process moves forward, the people of Haiti will need increased opportunities, and strengthened capacity to lead and sustain their country's development. Taking heart from the global response, we urge that the plight of the Haitian people not be forgotten in the months and years ahead. The outpouring of love and support that has been shown since the earthquake demonstrates that Haiti holds a special place in minds and hearts of people all around the world. Our gathering is a further expression of that love and a sign of our commitment to live up to the demands of solidarity.

As we remember all the victims of the earthquake, we ask Mary, Mother of Perpetual Help, to comfort those who mourn and to pray with us for the needs of Haiti. The Lord lifts up the lowly and fills the hungry with good things.⁴ May our God, who encourages the downcast, bring kindness, justice and uprightness on the earth.⁵

⁴ Lk. 1:52

⁵ Jer. 9:24

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Most Rev. Pierre-André Dumas
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Most Rev. Guy Poulard
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Most Rev. Launay Saturné
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Most Rev. Joseph Lafontant
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