

Mennonite Central Committee Guiding Principles for a Just Response in Haiti

This document, developed in consultation with MCC workers in Haiti, is intended to guide MCC's advocacy efforts as Haiti rebuilds following the January 12, 2010, earthquake. This document will develop as the situation in Haiti changes and as MCC plans its long-term response.

Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), a worldwide ministry of Anabaptist churches, shares God's love and compassion for all in the name of Christ by responding to basic human needs and working for peace and justice.

MCC has worked in Haiti since 1958 in the areas of relief, development and peace through partnerships with local initiatives, congregations and denominations that seek to meet basic human needs.

The catastrophic earthquake that hit Haiti on January 12, 2010, is one the worst humanitarian disasters in the history of Western Hemisphere. Estimates are that more than 1 million people were displaced from their homes and up to 200,000 injured or killed. The international community has responded with a tremendous outpouring of compassion for the people of Haiti. We especially commend the response from the governments of the United States and Canada. And we call people in Canada and the United States to prayer and action for Haiti as MCC works alongside Haitian partners.

Three over-riding principles guide MCC's work in Haiti.

1. MCC's commitment to working toward the holistic and integrated well-being of communities and churches around the world stems from a dedication to God's vision of peace and dignity for humanity. This vision, from Micah 4:1-5,¹ holds central the immediate needs of basic human rights, such as access to food, health care, meaningful employment, security and education. It also presents us with the necessity of justice for the vision to be fulfilled and the importance of human empowerment for the assurance of meaningful processes of development and healing.
2. Haitians, like people everywhere, are children of God and should be approached with dignity and respect. The Haitian people are the keepers of a vibrant, resilient culture that has endured many hardships and has much to offer the rest of the world.
3. All reconstruction efforts, at both local and national levels, must be guided by Haitians themselves. Millions of dollars and thousands of volunteers are arriving in Haiti to help the country rebuild. Plans are being drawn up by many well-meaning people. But if Haitians do not have a hand in formulating the plans and do not own the reconstruction efforts, they will ultimately be unsuccessful in their attempts to rebuild the country.

¹ The Micah text is at the end of this document.

MCC is committed to approaching Haiti in the aftermath of the earthquake in a way that holds the dignity of the Haitian people above all, and is just and sustainable, addressing immediate needs and creating an environment for positive, long-term development.

The challenge of rebuilding Haiti is compounded by multiple pre-existing factors such as the devastation of four hurricanes in 2008, an ongoing food crisis, a global economic/financial crisis, environmental degradation, political instability, foreign interventions and liberalized trade/economic policies.

As the international community moves forward with relief and recovery efforts we urge that the following be taken into account:

1. Sustainable, long-term development coupled with economic reform policies

Haiti's economy was in a state of crisis long before the earthquake. More than 80 percent of the population lived under the poverty level, earning less than \$2 per day. Haiti needs sustainable, long-term development coupled with economic reform policies rather than just short-term reconstruction.

- a) Haiti should not be obstructed from determining its own food security needs. In the 1980s Haiti was nearly self-sufficient in food production, most of its farmers could earn a living and the Haitian population purchased local food. Today, up to 70 percent of Haiti's food comes from imports and Haiti's agriculture remains in shambles due to economic policies that have debilitated local food production and rural development.

In 2008, the Haitian government implemented the International Monetary Fund (IMF)-sponsored Poverty Reduction Strategy Plan (PRSP), which names rural and agricultural development as one of the pillars of development.

In order for the Haitian government to provide sustainable livelihoods and food security for its people, the new priority of the PRSP, and additional funds, must support and rebuild local agricultural production by:

- i) Allowing the Haitian government to regulate food imports.
 - ii) Advocating that the government legislate agricultural subsidies.
 - iii) Providing Haitian farmers with access to credit.
 - iv) Repairing and improving agricultural infrastructure.
 - v) Ensuring that farmers have legal rights to their land.
 - vi) Investing in participatory, farmer-led research and knowledge transfer for small-scale farmers in Haiti.
- b) The earthquake has stimulated reverse migration from urban centers to rural communities. The Haitian government estimates that more than 250,000 people have migrated out of Port-au-Prince as a result of the disaster. In addition to revitalizing the economy in Port-au-Prince, development efforts must focus on rural community and agricultural development in order to provide sustainable livelihoods for the rest of the country.

- c) The international community must follow through on its commitment at the G7 meetings to full debt cancellation, and should further commit to ensuring that Haiti does not fall under any additional debt burden. All current loans should be turned into grants, as the IMF has pledged, and future grants and loans should not come with any attached economic conditions. This will allow the Haitian government to set reconstruction and development priorities for itself.

2. *Transparent and Haitian-led use of donor funds*

U.S. and Canadian citizens have donated millions of dollars for Haiti. Aid agencies, including MCC, have committed to long-term support. U.S., Canadian, European and other governments have pledged millions in foreign assistance. These committed funds must be used in programs that are Haitian led and in a transparent manner to ensure that every dollar is truly used for the relief, reconstruction and long-term sustainable development of Haiti.

Even though local organizations have been affected by the earthquake, local community associations are present in the most devastated areas. Capacity and skill exists within the Haitian community to take charge of their relief, development and reconstruction needs. Local civil society must drive efforts to rebuild Haiti, rather than donor requirements.

3. *Clarified mandate and length of stay of U.S. and Canadian troops*

As of March 15, 2010, there were approximately 8,000 U.S. military personnel deployed in Haiti. Canada has deployed an additional 2,000 troops, including a disaster assistance response team.

The military was perhaps one of the only institutions with the capacity to respond quickly and effectively to immediate infrastructure needs following the calamity in the country. However, the militarization of disaster relief and foreign aid raises serious concerns. Haiti is no stranger to foreign military intervention and the U.S. has militarily intervened in the country three times over the course of Haiti's history. The Canadian military was involved in the international military force that preceded the current United Nations Peacekeeping Mission, MINUSTAH. Given its observations of the use of military personnel in Haiti and other countries, and based on the concerns of Haitian partners, MCC is wary of the presence of foreign troops in Haiti. The military presence in Haiti lacks clarity in terms of mission, rules of engagement and length of stay.

The U.S. and Canadian governments must do the following:

- a) Clearly define how the U.S. and Canadian governments are collaborating with the United Nations and not multiplying or confusing relief efforts. The lack of clarity with the regard to the mandate of the military contingents and poor coordination give the impression that the forces are effectively militarizing the country.
- b) Clearly articulate the mission as strictly short-term relief and humanitarian support. Military forces currently on the ground are providing crucial logistical and operational support, while civilian agencies have the experience and expertise needed to deliver assistance. Assistance currently being provided by military personnel should be handed over to civilian agencies as soon as possible, leaving the military to focus on providing

logistical and operational support as well as building the capacity of the Haitian government.

- c) Clearly define and publicize the military's rules of engagement. The military should not engage in fighting the Haitian people. While isolated incidents of violence have occurred, by and large the survivors of the disaster have acted with compassion and love for their neighbors. The presence of foreign military forces risks criminalizing these survivors. The Haitian National Police should take the lead in providing security and foreign troops can provide support to make this possible.
- d) Set a clear timetable for handing over responsibility and withdrawal of troops from Haitian soil. This could minimize Haitian concerns of another foreign military occupation.

4. *Compassionate and respectful treatment of refugees and immigrants*

Haiti has experienced significant flows of out-migration for several decades, particularly to the U.S. and Canada. A number of factors, such as the desire to be with family, have access to resources or escape harsh conditions, have compelled people to take the tremendous risk of emigrating without proper documentation. While a natural disaster does not necessarily generate increased flows of out-migration, the severity of the recent earthquake coupled with pre-existing economic hardships in Haiti, as well as loose enforcement of human rights standards and rule of law, will likely cause many to seek refuge outside the country.

In such a situation, it is important for foreign governments to treat all immigrants and refugees, whether legal or undocumented, with dignity, compassion and respect for their human rights. Additionally, government policies should reflect both the immediate needs of individual Haitians and the best long-term interests of their families, communities and the country as a whole. Immigrants and refugees living outside of Haiti, whether on a temporary or permanent basis, can work and send money back to Haiti, which contributes to both short-term relief and long-term development of their home communities.

However, in order to discourage large numbers of out-migration, a swift and efficient recovery and reconstruction response is needed. If basic needs are being met and progress is visibly being made toward a better future, Haitians will be more likely to stay and rebuild rather than face the difficult challenges inherent in becoming an uprooted person. For the long-term development of the whole country, it is important that Haitians with energy, knowledge and physical capacity stay in Haiti to help reconstruct their communities.

With regard to immigration and refugee policies, MCC advocates that the U.S. government should:

- a) For Haitians in the U.S. seeking Temporary Protected Status:
 - i) Waive fees for low-income applicants.
 - ii) Release Haitians currently in detention centers for immigration violations so that they can apply for TPS.
- b) For refugees:

- i) Consider allowing some of Haiti's most vulnerable – children, the elderly and the sick – who have lost caregivers in Haiti, but who have relatives in the U.S, to immigrate legally.
 - ii) Continue transporting some of the most serious medical cases to hospitals in the U.S. Provide adequate assistance to those released from the hospital into local communities. Extend Temporary Protected Status to this population. Provide transportation back to Haiti for those who wish to return.
 - iii) Proceed with extreme caution on any plan to use the Guantanamo Bay Naval Base as a large-scale refugee camp or as an immigration detention center for Haitians attempting to flee to the U.S. Advocacy groups are raising serious concerns about long-term separation from home communities and about erecting an immigration detention center outside of the U.S. where individuals would not have habeas corpus rights.
 - iv) Treat all those seeking refuge on our shores humanely and with dignity.
- c) For orphans:
- i) Discourage efforts to remove large numbers of children from Haiti through inter-country adoptions.² (Note: The U.S. government has granted “humanitarian parole” for adoptions already in process and nearly finalized, whereby visas for these children are being expedited.)
 - ii) In all cases, ensure that international statutes and obligations to combat human trafficking are rigorously applied and enforced.³

With regard to immigration and refugee policies, MCC advocates that the Canadian government should:

- a) For those with temporary status:
 - i) Consider immediate Permanent Resident status on all counts, including fast-tracked family reunification for such individuals.
 - ii) Waive all fees currently in effect for renewals or Permanent Resident processing.
- b) For refugee claimants and asylum seekers:
 - i) Fast track current applications and interviews and review all under relaxed criteria.
 - ii) For accepted claimants, waive all fees and fast track all family members to join them.
 - iii) Urge the U.S. to proceed with extreme caution on any plan to use the Guantanamo Bay Naval Base as a large-scale refugee camp or as an immigration detention center for Haitians attempting to flee Haiti.
 - iv) Release Haitian claimants currently in immigration detention.
- c) For orphans:

² The International Reference Centre for the Rights of Children Deprived of their Family (ISS/IRC) recommends that, “In general, international adoption should not take place in a situation of war or natural disaster, given that these events make it impossible to verify the personal and family situation of children.” <http://uai-news.blogspot.com/2010/01/international-reference-centre-for.html>

³ In the wake of a natural disaster, there is always increased risk of child exploitation by kidnapers and human traffickers. Furthermore, most of the children in Haitian orphanages are there not because their parents are deceased, but because their parents could no longer afford to care for them.

- i) Discourage efforts to remove large numbers of children from Haiti through inter-country adoptions, other than those already processed and matched with sponsors abroad.
- ii) In all cases, ensure that Best Interests of the Child statutes are observed and that international statutes and obligations to combat trafficking are rigorously applied and enforced.

Miche 4:1-5 (Kreyol)/Micah 4:1-5 (New Revised Standard Version)

¹Yon tan gen pou rive! Lè sa a, mòn kote tanp lan ye a va pi wo pase tout lòt mòn yo. L'ap kanpe byen wo nan mitan mòn yo. Moun va soti an kantite toupatou vin sou li.

²Anpil moun lòt nasyon va vini, y'a di: Ann ale sou mòn Seyè a! Ann ale nan tanp Bondye pèp Izrayèl la! L'a moutre nou jan li vle nou viv la. Konsa, n'a mache nan chemen l'a mete devan nou an. Paske, Seyè a rete sou mòn Siyon an, l'ap bay lòd li. Seyè a rete lavil Jerizalèm, l'ap pale ak pèp li a.

³L'ap regle kont nasyon yo gen yonn ak lòt, l'ap sèvi jij pou gwo peyi ki byen lwen. Y'ap pran mato, y'ap fè zam yo tounen zouti pou travay tè. Y'ap fè nepe yo tounen sèpèt. Nasyon yo p'ap fè lagè yonn ak lòt ankò. Yo p'ap janm aprann fè lagè ankò.

⁴Tout moun va viv ak kè poze anba tonèl rezen yo, anba pye fig Frans yo. Pesonn p'ap chache yo kont. Sa se pawòl ki soti nan bouch Seyè a!

⁵Chak nasyon ap viv dapre lòd bondye pa yo ba yo. Men nou menm, n'ap viv dapre lòd Seyè a, Bondye nou an, pou tout tan tout tan.

¹In days to come the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised up above the hills. Peoples shall stream to it,

²and many nations shall come and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

³He shall judge between many peoples, and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more;

⁴but they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken.

⁵For all the peoples walk, each in the name of its god, but we will walk in the name of the Lord our God forever and ever.

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