

February 1, 2010

The Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton  
Department of State  
Washington, D.C. 20520

The Honorable Rajiv Shah  
U.S. Agency for International Development  
Washington, D.C. 20523

Dear Secretary Clinton and Administrator Shah:

We write to thank the Administration for its swift and strong response to the earthquake in Haiti, and to urge you to ensure that the protection needs of women and girls are integrated into early and longer-term response activities, and are fully funded by the U.S. and other donors.

As you know, women and girls are particularly at risk in humanitarian crises, including natural disasters. They are vulnerable to violence and sexual exploitation in a disaster's aftermath, and are frequently excluded from assistance programs because their specific needs were not taken into account during program design and implementation.

In recent years, the humanitarian community, including U.N. agencies and civil society organizations, has developed excellent guidance to ensure that women and girls and other vulnerable populations are fully protected and have safe access to food and cooking fuel, shelter, clean water, health care and other services. The challenge now is to strengthen implementation of the guidance and improve protection on the ground.

The Inter-Agency Standing Committee's (IASC) *Gender Handbook in Humanitarian Action* lays out the specific actions that should be taken by various sectors to integrate gender concerns from the outset of an emergency. The U.S. should ensure that the response activities it supports are consistent with this guidance so that all persons in need have full access to our assistance programs.

We call your attention as well to the IASC's *Guidelines for Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Settings*, which details priority actions by sector to prevent gender-based violence (GBV) and provide care for survivors. Even before the earthquake, sexual violence and exploitation were a concern in Port-au-Prince, and we know that GBV, including domestic violence, is a particular problem in crises. The U.S. should press for GBV prevention and response to be addressed across the cluster system. Funding should be provided for multi-sectoral GBV interventions in accordance with the IASC guidelines. And police and security forces should be trained as soon as possible on GBV issues.

It is also critically important to include essential reproductive health services as a key component in our early response. The international standard is set out in the Minimum Initial Services Package (MISP). The MISP is a coordinated set of priority interventions that can prevent excess maternal and newborn morbidity and mortality, reduce HIV transmission and prevent and manage the consequences of sexual violence.

Through its leadership in the international community and its funding decisions, the U.S. can help ensure that the response in Haiti reflects the policy improvements and lessons learned from previous crises. In too many emergencies, the needs of women and girls have been overlooked and underfunded. The international community can do better as it develops a comprehensive assistance strategy for Haiti.

Our organizations deeply appreciate your commitment to the protection of women and girls, and look forward to working with the State Department and USAID to ensure that their needs are addressed in every aspect of our relief and rebuilding efforts in Haiti.

Sincerely,

American Friends Service Committee  
American Jewish World Service  
American Refugee Committee  
Amnesty International, USA  
Arab American and Chaldean Council  
Break the Cycle  
CARE  
Casa de Esperanza  
ChildFund International  
Church World Service  
Ethiopian Community Development Council  
Episcopal Migration Ministries  
Family Violence Prevention Fund  
Global AIDS Alliance  
Human Rights Watch  
International Center for Research on Women  
International Crisis Group  
International Medical Corps  
International Rescue Committee  
Ipas  
JSI Research and Training Institute  
Kurdish Human Rights Watch  
Legal Momentum  
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service  
Management Sciences for Health  
Marie Stopes International  
Mercy Corps  
National Alliance to End Sexual Violence  
National Center for Victims of Crime  
National Coalition Against Domestic Violence  
National Congress of American Indians  
National Network to End Domestic Violence  
Operation USA  
Oxfam America  
Plan USA  
Refugees International

Rural Development Institute  
Save the Children  
The Voices and Faces Project  
United Methodist Church, General Board  
of Church & Society  
United Nations Foundation  
Unitarian Universalist Service Committee  
White Ribbon Alliance for Safe Motherhood  
Winrock International  
Women's Refugee Commission  
Women Thrive Worldwide  
Women Watch Afrika, Inc

Supportive Tribal, State and Local Organizations

Advocacy Resource Center, Sault Ste. Marie  
Tribe of Chippewa Indians  
Center for Violence Prevention and Recovery,  
Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center  
Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation  
Colorado Coalition Against Sexual Assault  
Florida Council Against Sexual Violence  
Illinois Coalition Against Sexual Assault  
Nebraska Domestic Violence Sexual Assault  
Coalition  
New Mexico Coalition of Sexual Assault  
Programs, Inc.  
New Hampshire Coalition Against Domestic and  
Sexual Violence  
North Carolina Coalition Against Sexual Assault  
Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic  
Violence/National Resource Center on Domestic  
Violence  
Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape  
Texas Association Against Sexual Assault  
Victim Rights Law Center: Boston, MA;  
Portland, OR

cc: Ambassador Melanne Vermeer