



Remarks at the Donors' Conference for Haiti

Secretary Colin L. Powell

The World Bank
Washington, DC
July 20, 2004



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(8:30 a.m. EDT)

Thank you very much, Jim. It's a great pleasure for me to be here this morning. Everybody can hear all right? Good morning, everyone. Better now?

On behalf of President Bush and the U.S. delegation, I want to begin by thanking the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, the United Nations and the European Commission for their sponsorship of this donors' conference.

A tremendous amount of work has gone into organizing this meeting, and all of us are grateful to all the sponsors for the effective and efficient preparations, and especially to you, Jim, for your commitment to this effort. And I am pleased to welcome back to Washington the interim Prime Minister of the Republic of Haiti, Gerard Latortue, and members of his cabinet.

And I also would like to welcome the many other distinguished representatives here today from ten intergovernmental organizations, twenty international non-governmental organizations and over twenty donor countries. The presence of all these distinguished delegations attests to the fact that Haiti's return to the path of democracy, stability and prosperity is important to the international community, and thus the international community has come together.

I am glad in particular that the United Nations' Special Representative of the Secretary General for Haiti, Juan Gabriel Valdes, has joined us today, just a few days after his appointment. And in accordance with Security Council Resolution 1542, Ambassador Valdes will lead the U.N. Stabilization Mission in Haiti.

The Stabilization Mission's challenging mandate includes everything from ensuring a secure and stable environment to supporting constitutional processes, advancing national dialogue and reconciliation, promoting human rights and assisting the Haitian Government with free and fair elections.

Mr. Ambassador, you and your mission deserve the full support of the international community, and I am sure that you will receive it.

Ladies and gentlemen, friends and colleagues, all of us are here for one single purpose: to help the people of Haiti build a future of hope. For many years, Haitians have despaired, millions of dollars have been spent, and the international community has held many conferences on Haiti.

But today, the Haitian people have a new opportunity to fashion a better future and a new government that is determined to help them seize the opportunity that is before them. The proud and enterprising people of Haiti need and deserve this chance. Over the past twelve months especially, the people of Haiti have experienced economic crisis, political chaos, floods and fires.

Even before this year of multiple catastrophes, Haiti, as we all know, was in desperate need, suffering from poverty, suffering from disease, suffering from environmental disaster, and above all suffering from bad government. Haiti remains the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, with income per capita of less than \$400. Real income per capita has deteriorated well below the level recorded in 1960.

Last year, Haiti ranked 150th out of 175 countries on the UN Development Programme's Human Development Index. Haiti also suffers from the highest prevalence of HIV/AIDS in the Western Hemisphere. Some five percent of the population is afflicted with this terrible disease. Protracted political unrest and upheaval compounded Haiti's other hardships.

The conflict and looting that immediately preceded and followed President Aristide's departure further deepened the damage. Then in May, torrential rains flooded Haiti's deforested countryside, killing over a thousand people, displacing tens of thousands of others and laying waste to entire communities.

Some 3,400 homes were destroyed or damaged. Roads were washed away, impeding relief efforts. Wells were contaminated. Food crops were ruined and thousands of domestic animals were lost. This was a devastating blow to a rural area of the country, where the vast majority of the inhabitants survive by subsistence farming.

And within the past month, as we all have seen, fires of suspicious origin have torn through commercial districts in Port-au-Prince and Gonaives, jeopardizing the lives and livelihoods of Haiti's small business owners and the employees who depend on them for income to feed their families.

We and others in the international community responded to the immediate needs arising from these multiple catastrophes. Our task here today, however, is to examine what we can do over the longer-term to help the people of Haiti build a secure foundation for democracy and development.

The first and foremost prerequisite for Haiti's democratic and economic progress is stability, political stability. And I want to take this opportunity to thank France, Canada and Chile for joining us in contributing troops to the multinational interim force which brought that stability in early March.

And I also want to thank the nations who are now contributing to the United Nations Stabilization Force, ably led by Brazil, and the many other nations who will soon contribute to that force. As the stabilization force continues to grow, and the capacity of the Haitian national police is strengthened through training and recruitment, security will improve across Haiti.

Beyond stability, Haiti's democratic and economic progress will require honest, inclusive government and sound economic policies and procedures. In President Alexandre and Prime Minister Latortue and his cabinet, Haiti now has leaders who are ready to take on great challenges for the sake of their people.

The interim government has already taken some solid steps toward much-needed democratic and economic change. Press freedom has improved dramatically. In April, the interim government signed a compact with political parties and civil society representatives.

The government committed itself to uphold the rule of law and to mount free and fair elections next year in which the interim leaders agreed they would not compete. Haiti's Provisional Electoral Council is moving forward on elections preparations. The government continues to reach out to all political parties.

These are positive signs that the government is committed to creating a new kind of political dialogue in Haiti, a dialogue that emphasizes tolerance, that emphasizes consensus and that emphasizes inclusiveness. To support the Haitian Government's elections efforts, close cooperation and coordination between the United Nations and the Organization of American States and CARICOM will be essential.

We in the international community place high importance on the political neutrality of the interim government and on an all-embracing process of national reconciliation. Although Haiti's police force and courts require vast improvements, we urge the government to continue to demonstrate its commitment to the rule of law and equal justice.

On the economic front, the government has made clear its determination to implement structural reforms such as establishing an anti-corruption unit and eliminating discretionary ministerial accounts to ensure greater discipline and transparency in the way public money is spent.

And the government has reaffirmed this reform agenda in its accord with the International Monetary Fund. On the diplomatic front, the interim government is reaching out in particular to Haiti's Caribbean neighbors, signaling its desire to work with them on issues of mutual interest from commercial cooperation to the strengthening of democratic institutions.

And I commend those Caribbean nations that have shown a willingness to grasp Haiti's offer of goodwill and cooperation. Later this morning, Prime Minister Latortue will present his government's vision for its future and how Haiti proposes to use the funds we donate to return to the path of democracy and development.

Haiti's needs are great, but with our help, her government and people will be equal to the task. In late May, with the participation of the World Bank and 25 other donor institutions, Haiti's government completed a needs assessment. The assessment set the estimated assistance need for Haiti as \$1.365 billion through September 2006.

After taking into account Haiti's current planned resources and the pledges it has already received, the Bank estimates a significant shortfall of \$924 million, and we must close that gap. For our part, I am pleased to report that the Bush Administration has tripled the amount of aid we originally designated for Haiti this fiscal year.

We have identified about \$120 million in additional assistance, and \$19 million of that is new money to be used largely to fight HIV/AIDS. And so, our fiscal year 2004 total comes to about \$180 million.

Prior to the current crisis in Haiti, the Bush Administration had requested that Congress appropriate close to \$52 million in fiscal year 2005. If these funds also are made available, our overall total aid for 2004 and 2005 combined will come to about \$230 million.

The United States will target our assistance on four key areas. First, we will help the Haitians prepare for free and fair elections, promote voter education and strengthen democratic institutions. We will help Haiti meet the health and humanitarian needs of its most vulnerable citizens, particularly those suffering from HIV/AIDS.

We will support a jobs program to spur economic activity and repair neglected infrastructure. And we will help the Haitian national police become apolitical, an apolitical, professional corps dedicated to protecting the rights of all citizens and upholding the rule of law throughout the country.

I cannot emphasize enough the importance of the pledges that all of us make today for the future of Haiti. We donors must coordinate among ourselves, with the core group of leading contributors chaired by U.N. Special Representative Valdes and with the Haitian Government to establish benchmarks for progress and timelines for achieving results.

Together, we must ensure that our assistance flows rapidly, expeditiously so that the Haitian people soon see concrete improvements in their daily lives, such as new jobs, better roads, cleaner, safer streets, and water that is fit to drink. Like people everywhere, Haitians want to live in dignity and in safety.

They want to be able to provide for their families. They want a good, accountable government that doesn't steal from them. The creative drive and entrepreneurial spirit of the Haitian people are well known. Wherever Haitian immigrants have settled, they have thrived and they have contributed to the welfare of their new home, never forgetting their Haitian legacy.

The people of Haiti will work hard to build a better future for their children – a future that befits a proud and independent country celebrating its bicentennial year of independence.

And we must help Haiti build that future, not just because it is right and good to do so. We must also help the Haitian people because the international community will benefit from the transformation of Haiti into a fully democratic, stable and prosperous country.

The United States, President Bush and all of my colleagues in the Administration look forward to working with all of you in the months and years ahead as we turn our combined commitments of support into a strong foundation of hope for our friend and neighbor Haiti.

I have a particular commitment to this effort and to Haiti. In my career as a soldier and my career in private life as well as now in my role as Secretary of State, I have had much to do with events in Haiti. In 1994, I was privileged to go with former President Carter and Senator Nunn to get the generals out of power and assist President Aristide in coming back in. Unfortunately, in the years subsequent to 1994, we didn't see the kind of progress that we had hoped for. We saw a great deal of investment from the international community not used for proper purposes.

But we can't give up. We have a new start. The tragic events of earlier this year, where the country seemed to be descending into chaos before we took action to arrest that descent into chaos. The coming forth of proud and courageous men such as President Alexandre and Prime Minister Latortue, who are willing to leave the comfort of what they were doing to take on these challenges, shows that there are leaders committed to taking Haiti into a brighter, better future -- anything that would be better than the past that they have endured in recent times.

And so we come together once again to pledge to the Haitian people, to pledge to the Prime Minister and to the leaders of his government, that the international community will be there for them and for the Haitian people, and above all for the children of Haiti who will benefit from the actions that we take during this conference.

Thank you so very much.

(Applause.)
2004/791

Released on July 20, 2004

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