

# Haiti Present, Haiti Future

## Gray Panthers—Calls to Action

**Devastated Haiti needs help now and tomorrow and for years to come.**

**Whether Haiti will rise from the rubble a better place or a worse place than it was will be argued for months and worked out in the future.**

**But Haiti needs our action now, as a memorial to those lost and to provide hope to survivors.**

Bound by common humanity, we feel the anguish of the Haitian people as they bury their dead, work to save the lives of injured survivors and struggle to survive like refugees in their own country. Rebuilding is a dream for the future; hope is needed in the present. They have our condolences and our pledge of support and solidarity in the months and years ahead.

Gray Panthers can make a difference in many ways:

### **Gray Panthers Action #1: Press Policy Makers to Cut the Red Tape**

Relief materials and personnel are in Haiti, and more are coming. But, logistical bottlenecks prevent food, medicines, water, tents and more from reaching everyone who needs them. Bottlenecks will not disappear by magic; they need immediate attention and on-the-spot remedies.

We have more to fear from slow distribution of food and medicine than we do from the possibility of petty corruption amidst the devastation. A case of baby formula or diapers is likely to be used for its intended purposes, even if the chain of distribution is unorthodox. No one is going to spirit away cases of beans or formula to buy a condo in Dubai or a Rolls Royce.

Unfortunately, it is too easy to assume that U.S. troops on the ground and others, who are working hard, are achieving the best results possible. The systems for distribution of resources need to be straightened out by cutting red tape and by daring to make and use informal systems to get aid moving, even if paper trails are incomplete or missing for a time. Ironically, such life-saving action will certainly expose rescue efforts to harsh political criticism.

Gray Panthers can help:

**Contact Senators and Representatives in Washington** to enlist their interest and their support in speeding relief to Haiti.

- Point out that failures on the ground in the Haiti emergency predict future failures in the event of emergencies in the US.
- Ask why news accounts of conditions continue to report bottlenecks in distribution of food, water, medicines, tents and more.
- Demand hearings and formal reporting to Congress on the US response to the Haitian catastrophe.
- Schedule reasonable and sympathetic oversight of rescue efforts so that the realities of relief

operations will be part of the public discussion. Critics of the effort will certainly have their forums but they should not be the only ones speaking out.

### **Gray Panthers Action #2: House Refugees Now**

Thousands of Haitians can be housed temporarily with relatives already in the U.S.

“**Humanitarian parole**” is a flexible legal mechanism and it should be used creatively, especially to bring injured, aged and other vulnerable Haitians to the US where they can be housed temporarily by willing family members. Red tape keeps that from happening.

To cut the red tape, our elected officials must face an anti-immigrant backlash, probably racially-based. Demand that the US government act without considering the sordid politics of the anti-immigrant fringe. Haitian refugees should be treated the same as if they were French Canadians or any of our other neighbors.

Gray Panthers can help by contacting the State Department and their Congressional delegation to demand that 'humanitarian parole' visas be granted liberally and without racial bias.

### **Gray Panthers Action #3: Give Generously**

Gray Panthers, like others around the world, are giving generously to relief organizations engaged in recovery and emergency response. These organizations offer tangible, realistic hope for survival. Gray Panthers are urged to continue to give to reputable charities of their choice which will provide short-term relief and longer-term rebuilding.

### **Gray Panthers Action # 4: Stick with Haiti for the Long Term**

Gray Panthers urge Americans to learn about Haiti's heroic and troubled history, and to understand how U.S. Policies have affected that nation since its beginning. Haiti is a neighbor and we are bound together by geography and intertwined history, by immigration and by exploitation, by apathy and by military interventions.

Now, in the aftermath of the earthquake, opportunity arises for a new perspective and new outcomes, but they will come only with persistent attention to the Haiti – U.S. relationship.

Gray Panthers networks [and individuals] can help by:

- educating themselves and others as to the issues;
- seeking out Haitians who now live in the US to help understand the situation and, where possible, ask them to share their knowledge of Haitian politics, culture and needs;
- publicly acknowledging our moral and humanitarian obligations to Haiti, and
- holding politicians accountable for shaping and implementing a proper, long-term relationship between our countries.
- Following up by pressing responsible officials and members of the House and Senate to report progress not only in relief efforts but also in long-term re-building of Haiti's physical, social and political infrastructures.

## **Haiti Future**

Haiti's infrastructure is in rubble. As Haiti rebuilds, it has opportunity to build better roads, hospitals, schools, housing and all the rest.

But infrastructure is not all that needs rebuilding. Haiti's history needs to be consigned to the rubble as well, at least the parts of that history that denied Haitians real self-determination, humane civil government and lasting democratic institutions.

International agencies and governments will provide materials and technical support, at least for a time to repair and replace buildings, roads, hospitals and the like.

But those same international agencies and governments need to foster Haiti's regrowth of institutions from within. Choices shaping the future should not be made by outsiders, especially outsiders acting in their own interests.

### **Gray Panthers can show support:**

- National Gray Panthers will convey its views to secretary of State Hillary Clinton and to the House and Senate Foreign Relations committees.
- We will stress the need for immediate delivery of relief supplies and elimination of logistical bottlenecks which keep food, clothing, medicines and tents away from those in need.
- We will urge continued attention and long-term commitments to Haiti, not only for rebuilding infrastructure but also for the autonomy of the Haitian people and their quest for democratic government.
- We will put forward our view that our long and unhappy relationship with Haiti needs to be reshaped in a multinational, non-exploitative context, emphasizing the need for Haitians, not foreign powers to choose their leaders democratically.
- We will emphasize our support for temporarily housing injured and vulnerable Haitians with family members in the U.S.
- We will demand that our government make its policies and decisions about Haiti public and transparent. Our public officials, elected and otherwise, must be accountable for the actions they take—or do not take—to shape present relief operations. Also, decisions affecting Haiti's future must be open to public scrutiny in order to break the history of economic exploitation that has kept Haiti vulnerable.

Individuals and Networks can also help Haiti:

- Write to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, and to your congressional delegation and press for United Nations involvement in Haiti to rebuild infrastructure, to develop a viable economy, to keep peace and to protect human rights until a democratic Haitian Government can do so.
- Urge that Haitians be allowed to choose their own leaders, without regard for the preferences of other nations, especially those with a track record of exploitation and anti-democratic intervention.
- Barring unilateral investments and involvement by national governments to avoid re-establishing economic and military dependence which lead to exploitation; instead, international involvement should be channeled through bodies such as the United Nations and its agencies.

- Recognition of the United States' past and present connections with Haiti, including a moral obligation to support a strong, self-governing Haiti through on-going financial contributions (through international agencies). Such contributions, from the US and others, would be recompense for past exploitation.

Gray Panthers recognizes the significant progress that has been made in forgiving Haiti's international debts. National Gray Panthers will write to Secretary of Treasury Timothy Geithner thanking him for his leadership in this area but also urging that this policy be enacted immediately.