

# WORLD YWCA SOLIDARITY VISIT TO THE YWCA OF HAITI

24 February – 1 March 2010

« Toutan tèt pòko koupe, li espere pote chapo »<sup>1</sup>



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<sup>1</sup> A Haitian Creole proverb that when directly translated states: As long as the head is not cut, it hopes to wear a hat, which means: As long as we are alive, we have to be strong and never despair.

## I. INTRODUCTION

A massive 7.0-magnitude earthquake struck the Republic of Haiti on Tuesday January 12, 2010 and affected the following metropolitan areas: Carrefour, Delmas, Pétion-Ville, Tabarre, Cité Soleil, Croix des Bouquets, and the following cities outside of Port-au-Prince: Léogâne, Petit-Goâve, Grand-Goâve and Jacmel.

The earthquake, the worst in the region in more than 200 years, has left more than 250,000 people dead, displacing over a million, and affecting over 3,000,000. Most public buildings and the majority of Ministries were also seriously affected, making it almost impossible for the already weak and fragile Government of Haiti to respond in a timely and efficient manner to the crisis. The Post Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) report has been released. This document which was prepared by the Government of Haiti with the support of the international community focuses on sector evaluation of damage, losses and needs. PDNA findings reveal that the total value of damage and losses caused by the January 12 earthquake is estimated at US\$7.8 billion (US\$4.3 billion represents physical damage and US\$3.5 billion are economic losses). The damage and losses are equivalent to more than 120% of the 2009 gross domestic product (GDP).<sup>2</sup>

Evidence shows that levels of violence against women (VAW) increase during and after disasters.<sup>3</sup> Women's human rights are often ignored with consequences that last long after the initial natural devastation. The above-mentioned increase in VAW includes sexual harassment and rape. There is also a greater vulnerability to trafficking, and reduced or lost access to reproductive health services. The YWCA as an advocate for a human rights based approach to development can address these issues with governments and international relief organisations and can identify how "safe spaces" for women and children can be created for internally displaced populations.

The YWCA of Haiti was established in 2007 and registered in 2008. The association is led by a Board of Directors composed of 7 young professional women. It is currently a "developing group" working towards affiliation with the World YWCA. YWCA Haiti's mission is to empower young Haitian women to ensure they are able to fully participate in the reconstruction of their communities and its three priority areas are: girls' education, young women's leadership and women's health, including sexual and reproductive health.

Since the "Living Letters"<sup>4</sup> solidarity visit to Haiti in November 2008, the World YWCA has been very concerned about the increase in levels of violence, especially sexual violence, against young women and girls in Haiti. Due to the poor functioning of the judiciary system and the limited number of referrals, many women who were raped or who experienced sexual violence, were unable to get legal assistance and support. In addition, stigma attached to rape led women to remain silent. After the January 12<sup>th</sup> earthquake and the breakdown of the majority of support systems, the risk factors to sexual violence and other forms of violence against women increased considerably, especially in the camps.

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<sup>2</sup> OCHA Situation Report, 24 March 2010.

<sup>3</sup> PAHO Fact Sheet, Gender and Natural Disasters.

<http://www.paho.org/English/DPM/GPP/GH/genderdisasters.PDF>

<sup>4</sup> The 'Living Letters' solidarity visit was organised by the World Council of Churches (WCC) as part of its Decade to Overcome Violence (2001-2010), an initiative promoting peaceful alternatives to violence. The World YWCA took part in the delegation, which was hosted by the Protestant Federation of Haiti in collaboration with ecumenical and church agencies based in the country.

## II. WORLD YWCA SOLIDARITY TEAM

The World YWCA decided to pay a solidarity visit to the YWCA of Haiti following the January 12<sup>th</sup> earthquake. The visit took place from February 24 – March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2010. The Solidarity Visit Team comprised of Donnalie Edwards-Cabey (right), President of the YWCA of the Virgin Islands and World Staff member, Marie-Claude Julsaint (left), Regional Director for the Americas and the Caribbean.



Donnalie is a native of Antigua who has resided in the US Virgin Islands as of 2004 when her husband became the Assistant Pastor of St. Andrew's Episcopal Church. Donnalie is an active volunteer and board member with engagement in several faith based organisations, both in the Virgin Islands and across the Caribbean. She has served as a Board member and youth advisor to the Caribbean Conference of Churches (1985-1994), was a Youth Consultant to the WCC Youth Office (Geneva, 1994-1997) and she also served as a member of the executive and central committees of the World Council of Churches (WCC) (1998-2005). She also served as moderator of the WCC Youth Working group for three years.

Marie-Claude Julsaint, of Haitian origin, holds the post of World YWCA regional director for the Americas and the Caribbean since 2001. Raised in Haiti, Marie-Claude moved to Switzerland when she was 18 but is actively involved with the Haitian community in Geneva and continues to have strong ties in Haiti. In 2008, she was part of an international ecumenical team of church and faith-based organisation representatives who paid a solidarity visit to churches and civil society groups in Haiti. After the January 12<sup>th</sup> earthquake, Marie-Claude participated in the drafting of the Charter for Reconstruction, an initiative of the Haitian Diaspora in Switzerland.

The Solidarity Team arrived in Haiti, via the Dominican Republic, on February 25<sup>th</sup>. The first evening in Port-au-Prince, the Team had dinner with the Board members of the YWCA of Haiti; Nathalie Brunet (President), Rachel Coupaud, Genevieve Michel, Ann Valerie Timothee Milfort, Melissa Coupaud and Tamara Guerin Barrau (Treasurer). The Team listened to each YWCA sister's personal story, emotional pain and trauma of experiencing the loss of family members and/or friends and destruction of homes and livelihoods due to the earthquake. But despite the pain, there were also stories of laughter, courage, resilience and leadership. This experience and safe space of mutual sharing demonstrated the need for and the importance of psychological support for YWCA members, for women and girls, and for Haitians in general. This was further reinforced by all the encounters with Haitians with whom the Team met during their visit.

### III. THE YWCA OF HAITI

The YWCA of Haiti began to function in 2007 and was legally registered in Haiti in 2008. It is currently led by a Board of Directors composed of 7 professional women. Its mission is to empower young Haitian women to fully participate in the reconstruction of their communities.

The YWCA of Haiti is engaged in three key areas: girls' education, young women's leadership and women's health, including sexual and reproductive health. Its current objectives are to promote the education and leadership of young Haitian women, including in the response to HIV and AIDS.

The YWCA of Haiti has made good progress in terms of its organisational development since its establishment in 2007, however the association would benefit from capacity building support which could include:

- Technical support (project planning, coordination, monitoring and evaluation tools)
- Office space and equipment
- Paid staff (office administration and project coordination)
- Training of trainers for counseling and reproductive health services in crisis situations

### IV. STRENGTHENING LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS AND NETWORKING

During the solidarity visit, the Team met with several existing and potential partners of the YWCA of Haiti.

a) Meeting with Femmes en Democratie (FED)

FED, a local Haitian women's organisation whose mission is to expand Haitian women's role in generating economic opportunities, increasing political participation and protecting human rights, is a partner of the YWCA of Haiti. FED and YWCA of Haiti have plans to conduct a series of leadership development workshops for young women, using the World YWCA/UNFPA training manual, "*Empowering Young Women to Lead Change manual*".

b) Meeting with UNIFEM-Haiti

The YWCA delegation met briefly with Kathy Mangones, Director for the Haiti Office and her programme staff, Celia Romulus. UNIFEM-Haiti works in 3 key areas: governance, violence against women and security, and women's political participation but after the earthquake, new activities include shelter protection, reviewing the safe cities initiative and post trauma psychosocial support in camps. The multiple entry points for collaboration between UNIFEM-Haiti and YWCA of Haiti were identified, including the possibility of support for leadership training workshops with FED and training YWCA members in psychosocial counseling.

c) Meeting with UNFPA

The YWCA delegation met with Maxime Smith, UNFPA's Coordinator for Gender and Rights, who described activities led by UNFPA and other UN agencies after the earthquake, including meetings with civil society organisations, needs assessment in refugee camps and host communities, prevention messages and revitalizing a unique monitoring system. The YWCA of Haiti was invited to participate in the Gender Based Violence (GBV) sub-cluster and Protection sub-cluster meetings.

d) Meeting with the Sisters of the Congregation of St. Rose de Lima (SRL)

The Congregation of St. Rose de Lima operates an orphanage and 16 schools in Haiti, 8 of which were destroyed by the earthquake. The Team visited one of the schools, built in 1891 and which was considered, with its chapel, historical monuments. Sadly, a number of students died when their homes collapsed and due to severe damage, the primary school will need to be rebuilt. Within its strategic priority to support young girls' access to quality education, the YWCA of Haiti has plans to partner with the Sisters of the SRL Congregation and provide scholarships for girls.

e) Meeting with CREATIS

CREATIS is a decorative art school located in Petion-Ville and which was created in February 2009 to cater for about 120 street children and disabled adolescents between the ages of 15 and 21. The objective of the meeting was to discuss collaboration between CREATIS and the YWCA of Haiti, particularly focusing on the young women and children of the YWCA's Youth Center, located at walking distance from CREATIS.



Members of the YWCA of Haiti and the Solidarity Visit Team

## V. THE SITUATION OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN HAITI POST EARTHQUAKE

Recently, the Haitian Government produced a Post-Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA)<sup>5</sup> to serve as a blueprint for Haiti's reconstruction. Although the PDNA is comprised of eight themes: governance, productive sectors, social sectors, infrastructure sectors, territorial development, environment and disaster risk reduction, economic analysis and cross-cutting sector (including gender, youth, culture and social protection), only one theme (cross-cutting sector) peripherally addressed gender and women's issues.

A broad coalition of women from diverse backgrounds and women's organisations, working both in Haiti and at the global level, came together and produced a Gender Shadow Report<sup>6</sup> that provides a gender analysis of the PDNA, which was released prior to the Haiti Donors' Conference held at the United Nations in New York on March 31, 2010. A statement<sup>7</sup> calling for donor governments to ensure that Haitian women participate in Haiti's reconstruction was also drafted by the coalition and both YWCA of Haiti and World YWCA have signed on to it.

The Gender Shadow Report highlighted the fact that women and girls were disproportionately affected by the earthquake and reminded donor governments and the Haitian government of their responsibility to ensure that policies are non-discriminatory and gender sensitive, that women must participate actively and fully in the process of Haiti's reconstruction within a human-rights based approach, that reproductive health services need to be available for women in safe spaces, that women and girls need to access culturally sensitive psychological support, and that the capacity of local women's organisations is strengthened.

During and after its visit, the Solidarity Team remained concerned by the reports of increased sexual violence and exploitation of women and girls, particularly in the "refugee" camps. Likewise, the Team was concerned about the dire living conditions of Haitians, the general situation of the majority of camps, where most tents were made of sheets and fabric, and the fact that the distribution of tents was not reaching the most vulnerable populations. These "temporary" shelters, which were also set up spontaneously in the middle of some streets in Port-au-Prince, seemed to become permanently temporary, and with the rainy season approaching, this was a real concern.



A "temporary" camp with makeshift tents near the Champs-de-Mars in Port-au-Prince

<sup>5</sup> [http://gfdr.org/docs/PDNA\\_Haiti-2010\\_Working\\_Document\\_EN.pdf](http://gfdr.org/docs/PDNA_Haiti-2010_Working_Document_EN.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <http://tinyurl.com/ycke9h2>

<sup>7</sup> [http://org2.democracyinaction.org/o/5095/p/dia/action/public/?action\\_KEY=2402](http://org2.democracyinaction.org/o/5095/p/dia/action/public/?action_KEY=2402)

The Team was also concerned about the fracturing of families, which the earthquake had exacerbated. Many families lost members who died and many others who survived were separated from children and parents who left the capital or went to the United States. The Team heard of so many families that have been dislocated or have left Haiti to access schooling and a certain level of “normalcy”.

## VI. YWCA HAITI'S PROGRAMMATIC RESPONSE POST EARTHQUAKE

During the Solidarity Visit, the YWCA of Haiti's programmatic response to the earthquake, in line with its 2008/2011 Strategic Plan and taking into account its capacity, became quite clear.

### a) Establishment of a Youth Centre

YWCA Haiti proposes to create a Youth Center which will be a safe space where 45 children aged 3 to 12 and 15 young women aged 15 to 21, living in a vulnerable transition “refugee” camp in the Pétion-Ville area, will meet regularly during the week to participate in recreational activities and art, such as decorative painting, and leadership development training. Trained volunteers, teachers, psychologists and other specialists will lead the activities at the Youth Center.



Montessori school and YWCA Youth Center, Petion-Ville, Haiti

The Youth Center will:

- Provide parents with a safe space to leave their children for 12 hours per week all while accompanying them in the task of understanding, supporting and nurturing their children in these difficult times.
- Provide children with access to a safe space where they will engage in activities allowing them to deal with post traumatic stress, to share and learn about diverse subjects (such as hygiene, nutrition and protection against all forms of abuse), and regain a sense of normalcy, stability and hope.
- Provide young women with leadership training for impacting change within their communities, and train them to duplicate training.

## b) Leadership Training for Young Women

An initial series of eight (8) workshops will provide leadership training on the following subjects: HIV and AIDS, sexual and reproductive health, self esteem and body image, violence against women, human rights, economic justice, peace, and civic responsibility. The intensive workshops will provide young women with information and tools to gain insights on the issues, develop advocacy skills to educate and mobilize their peers for collaborating on the issues, and take concrete action.

The manual developed by World YWCA and the UNFPA will be used as a guide for this series of workshops. The leadership training workshops will be facilitated by YWCA Haiti members, in collaboration with Femmes en Démocratie (FED), a well respected women's organization that aims to empower Haitian women to fulfill their true potential in the areas of economic and entrepreneurial opportunity, political participation, and legal/human rights.

## VII. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Solidarity Team was deeply moved and transformed by the visit and experience in Haiti, as well as by the strength and resilience of the Haitian people. The Team was very grateful to the members of the YWCA of Haiti for their hospitality and generosity, even when they themselves were dealing with the personal upheaval and emotional dislocation which the earthquake had caused even 6 weeks later, and to the various partners and agencies that accepted to take the time from understandably busy schedules to meet with them. The Team was truly honored to have been selected to undertake this solidarity visit on behalf of the YWCA movement to accompany the YWCA of Haiti.

The last meeting with the members of the YWCA of Haiti provided an opportunity for the Team to share healing/prayer sticks (called "lapiz para la oración" in Spanish), a gift from Ivanne Farr, a member of the YWCA of the Virgin Islands, and to pray together. This powerful experience affirmed the bond of solidarity which exists in the YWCA movement. At this same meeting, 3 new members joined the YWCA. As Rachel Coupaud, Board member stated, "we are getting stronger every day!"

The Team commended the incredibly talented and tenacious women of the YWCA of Haiti for their stoic determination to engage with the reconstruction efforts. It was very clear that this moment created by the earthquake was a unique moment that offered opportunities for the growth and strengthening of the YWCA of Haiti to really make an impact in the lives of women and girls in Haiti, as well as an opportunity for the YWCA to forge beneficial community partnerships. The determination of all the members of the YWCA of Haiti to **choose** to help make a difference was indeed very strong.

### 1) Recommendations to the World YWCA

- As the YWCA of Haiti is a developing YWCA and does not as yet have full organisational capacity to manage large-scale projects and does not have a paid staff person in place to coordinate and manage its programmes, continue to accompany and provide technical support, coordination and advice to YWCA of Haiti Board members

- Provide information and regular updates on the work of the YWCA of Haiti to the YWCA movement, partners and donors
- Use existing international and regional partnerships with the United Nations, women's organisations and civil society networks to strengthen the role of the YWCA locally
- Advocate for the specific needs and the leadership of Haitian women and girls in the reconstruction of Haiti
- Review existing World YWCA mechanisms to support YWCA member associations and developing groups in the context of a national or local emergency crisis

2) Recommendations to Partners

- Support the work of the YWCA of Haiti through the World YWCA
- Provide continued support for Haiti beyond emergency aid, as part of a long term strategy
- Advocate for and support the leadership of Haitian women and Haitian women's organisations in the reconstruction of Haiti
- Advocate for grassroots and local women's organisations to be included in all discussions pertaining to Haiti's reconstruction

Report submitted by:

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Marie-Claude Julsaint

16 April 2010

## VIII. APPENDICES: ARTICLES AND STORIES ON THE WORLD YWCA WEBSITE

Call to Action:

<http://www.worldywca.org/en/YWCA-News/World-YWCA-and-Member-Associations-News/Tens-of-thousands-are-feared-dead-in-Haiti-after-the-powerful-earthquake-of-January-12-2010>

Statement of the Caribbean Conference of Churches:

<http://www.worldywca.org/en/YWCA-News/World-YWCA-and-Member-Associations-News/Respect-the-dignity-of-the-Haitian-People>

Testimony by Rachel Coupaud, YWCA Haiti Board member:

<http://www.worldywca.org/en/YWCA-News/World-YWCA-and-Member-Associations-News/Beauty-in-the-midst-of-chaos-Haiti>

Testimony by Genevieve Michel, YWCA Haiti volunteer Acting Secretary:

<http://www.worldywca.org/en/Member-Associations/Regions/Caribbean/YWCA-of-Haiti-Reconstruction-of-our-country-means-staying-to-continue>

Solidarity Visit to the YWCA of Haiti:

<http://www.worldywca.org/en/YWCA-News/World-YWCA-and-Member-Associations-News/Solidarity-Visit-to-the-YWCA-of-Haiti>

Call for Women's Participation:

<http://www.worldywca.org/en/YWCA-News/World-YWCA-and-Member-Associations-News/World-YWCA-and-YWCA-of-Haiti-call-for-Haitian-Women-s-Participation-and-Leadership-in-Reconstruction-of-Haiti>

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