

March 16, 2010

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton
United States Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary of State Clinton:

The earthquake in Haiti in January evoked a huge outpouring of solidarity throughout the world and particularly here in the United States. There has been an unprecedented mobilization from across the country to support the immediate needs of the Haitian people. We wish to stress our appreciation for how quickly and strongly the United States government responded to this major catastrophe.

The time has come to rebuild this small Caribbean country. As planning is underway for the International Donor Conference to be held in New York on March 31, we wish to draw your attention to the place that public education must occupy in the reconstruction process.

Our unions, NEA and AFT, share affiliation with Haitian educators of the Confédération Nationale des Educateurs d'Haïti (CNEH) in Education International. Through this global union federation for education, we have supported CNEH's efforts as an advocate for quality public education for all. CNEH is the largest Haitian education labor organization in Haiti. Its leaders have been coordinating with President Préval and the Parliament for the improvement of education in Haiti.

Even before the earthquake struck, it was clear that the commitment made by heads of state in Dakar in 2000 to achieve education for all by the year 2015 would not be fulfilled in Haiti. Now, with all the devastation brought to the school infrastructure, combined with the deaths of thousands of teachers and students, the attainment of this goal is compromised more than ever before.

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We believe that the recovery of the education sector must be at the heart of Haiti's reconstruction process, but what kind of recovery will it be? Given that more than 85 percent of educational services have, up until now, been provided by the private sector, education remains largely inaccessible in this country. Nearly 50 percent of the Haitian population is uneducated; Haiti is the poorest country in the Western hemisphere. The structural weaknesses inherent in this system are well known and thoroughly documented.

Any serious efforts aimed at revitalizing Haiti cannot consist solely of rebuilding destroyed schools to simply return to the situation that prevailed before the earthquake. Sufficient resources will have to be allocated by the international community in order to enable Haiti to lay the foundations for a solid public education system. We are convinced that this is the only viable option in order for Haiti to finally get on the path to sustainable development.

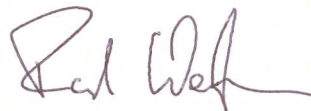
In addition to equipping the country with proper school infrastructure, it is imperative that the international community provide Haitian educators with the necessary resources so that they can benefit from adequate working conditions that will allow them to fully play their role in the recovery process.

As a key player in this huge project, the United States must be the strong leader and advocate of public education at the March 31 International Donor Conference. Every effort must be made to ensure that participating countries at this meeting firmly commit to building a sound public education system in Haiti. The future of all Haitians is at stake.

Sincerely,



Dennis Van Roekel
President
National Education Association



Randi Weingarten
President
American Federation of Teachers