



UN refugee agency marks two years since Haiti earthquake

January 11, 2012 – Washington, DC - On the eve of the two-year anniversary of the devastating earthquake that left Haiti in shambles, the United Nations refugee agency (UNHCR) pays tribute to the approximately two million Haitians affected by the quake.

UNHCR has played an important support role in the aftermath of the quake focusing its efforts in providing emergency relief items and following the emergency phase in providing quake victims with civil documentation and protecting victims of sexual violence.

While the number of persons still living in tents has reduced from 1.5 million, following the quake, to approximately a half a million, it would be wrong to think that the others have found sustainable solutions. Many displaced persons have been victims of forced eviction and have now been displaced two or three times. It is tempting for the international community to ignore this problem as the displaced are now less visible, but the consequences of not providing support to these “de-registered displaced persons” will have long-term effects on the communities.

UNHCR, with the support of Haitian partners ACAT, GARR and JRS, was able to provide 5,000 birth certificates in 2011 to displaced persons. Last Friday, UNHCR and ACAT distributed another 80 certificates to mostly children in the Carrefour camp in Port au Prince, Haiti.

“Moments before the distribution, these children didn’t legally exist. This piece of paper represents their ability to register and graduate from school, vote, legally marry, access state services and be treated with dignity and humanity,” said Charity Tooze, UNHCR’s Washington, DC, based Senior Communications Officer, who was present at the distribution.

UNHCR is encouraged by the pledges the Haitian government made at the ministerial meetings held in Geneva on December 7, 2011. The delegation pledged to ratify the 1961 Statelessness Convention and promised to update their civil registry system by making it accessible to people all over Haiti, affordable and to conduct a public awareness campaign. The government’s commitment to ratify the Convention will set a precedent for the entire Caribbean region – where few countries have signed the Convention.

The Prime Minister's advisors are working with UNHCR to sensitize the whole of the government to the need to update the system. To date approximately 40% of the population does not have a birth certificate. UNHCR is assisting the government in drafting a law that will be presented to parliament in June of 2012. The president has committed to universal education for all children regardless of their documentation status by 2015.

In addition, UNHCR has partnered with KOFAVIV, a grassroots women's organization run by and for survivors of sexual violence, on a pioneering safe house program, which is currently entering its second phase of the project. The project includes a livelihoods component where, through the support of partners, women receive micro-credit, financial literacy training, medical and psychosocial services. UNHCR's goal is by the end of the comprehensive program, the women will be self-sufficient and successfully forging their future.

While there have been great strides in Haiti, UNHCR remains alarmed at the rate of sexual violence in the camps especially against young girls. UNHCR urges the government to sensitize and train the local police force, so that perpetrators of sexual crimes are convicted and sentenced. In an environment of impunity, victims rarely come forward and perpetrators do not have an incentive to not attack vulnerable women and girls in the camps.

UNHCR is encouraged by new projects that provide cash and housing assistance to hundreds of thousands of internally displaced Haitians who are being relocated out of camps. However, UNHCR hopes that they are relocated into areas where they will have access to work, resources and a community structure where they can develop long-term residence and not be forced by despair to leave their country at great risk by sea.

Link to Videos:

Getting Paper's In Haiti

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ydpkGMxTKY&feature=relmfu>

Surviving the Camps

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CdpNfT7btu4>

Link to photos from 12/6/11 Birth Certificate Registration in Carrefour camps:

<http://bit.ly/yDmSNE>