

**15 January 2010**  
***For immediate release***

## **Haiti: ICMC applauds solidarity, Highlights role of migrants in post-disaster recovery**

**GENEVA, 15 January 2009—In the aftermath of the devastating earthquake that struck Haiti Tuesday, ICMC joins with its member bishop’s conferences worldwide in expressing heartfelt sympathy for the victims and their families, and the essential role that Haitian migrants can play in the country’s recovery.**

“Our thoughts and prayers are with the people of Haiti today, as well as with UN staff, members of the Catholic Church and so many others as they grieve the loss of colleagues and loved ones, even while continuing to search for survivors,” said Johan Ketelers, Secretary General of the International Catholic Migration Commission. ICMC also mourns the death of Monsignor Joseph Serge Miot, Archbishop of Port-au-Prince, in the earthquake.

Together with its members, ICMC applauds the swift response of governments, the Red Cross, UN actors, NGOs, churches and relief agencies including Caritas Haiti and Catholic Relief Services (CRS), in mobilizing emergency response and assistance.

“Beyond the urgent work of immediate rescue and relief, we are looking at a situation with long-lasting implications, including as they relate to migration and the country’s socio-economic recovery,” remarked Ketelers.

“An international conference should be called together to consolidate long-term efforts to support the Haitian community in rebuilding their country. Improving local perspectives for poverty reduction and dignified employment opportunities is critical.”

As the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, and with limited opportunities for work even prior to this latest disaster, a large number of Haitians have sought greater dignity and means to provide for themselves and their families by migrating abroad in recent years. Many have made headlines in their attempts to leave the country in treacherous journeys by boat. In total, more than 1.5 million Haitian-born emigrants live and work abroad, sending more than 2 billion USD of their personal earnings to support their families back home.

ICMC commends governments including Canada, France, the Dominican Republic and the United States for their decisions to suspend deportations of Haitian emigrants found in an irregular migration situation, and asks governments to expand access for Haitians to legal employment and public services as a humane, practical response to the tremendous challenges faced by the Haitian government and local community.

“If this is not a slam-dunk case for temporary status, I don’t know what is,” observes Kevin Appleby, a spokesman for the US Catholic Bishops Conference. Legal status in whatever their country of residence and employment could allow the millions of Haitians abroad to play a key role in rebuilding their home country through remittances and other contributions.

Facilitating the legal work and residence of immigrants in similar national emergency situations has already been proven to be an effective response mechanism; in the US, nationals of both Honduras and Nicaragua were granted temporary legal status after Hurricane Mitch in 1998, and Salvadorans after an earthquake in 2001.

In the wake of the disaster, concerns are also being raised about the potential for the large-scale migration of Haitians forced to look abroad for hope and employment—and about heightened vulnerabilities that will likely lead an increase in human trafficking, especially of women and children.

These fears underscore the critical importance of devising long-term development perspectives that include real opportunities for Haitians to build or rebuild dignified lives at home.

“We can only hope that this tragedy, which has prompted media attention and an outpouring of humanitarian assistance, will also bring lasting solutions and commitment to alleviate the misery of Haitians and the infrastructural poverty of this beleaguered nation,” remarked Cardinal Oscar Rodríguez Maradiaga, President of Caritas Internationalis and member of the ICMC Governing Committee.

ICMC encourages those who wish to make a donation to the Church’s relief and recovery work in Haiti to do so through special funding appeals set up for this purpose by both Caritas Internationalis and Catholic Relief Services.

**Caritas Internationalis**

To make a bank transfer:  
Unicredit Banca di Roma  
Iban: IT76 P 03002 05008 000400406198  
Bic/Swift: BROMITR1204  
<http://www.caritas.org>

**Catholic Relief Services (CRS)**

Checks may be mailed to:  
P.O. Box 17090  
Baltimore, MD 21203-7090  
USA  
[www.crs.org](http://www.crs.org)

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