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August 17, 2010

The Honorable John Conyers, Jr.
2426 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC

Dear Congressman Conyers:

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and Catholic Relief Services (CRS) support the thrust of the “Haiti Empowerment, Assistance, and Rebuilding Act” (HR 6021) which you have introduced and which enjoys broad sponsorship. We welcome your initiative to make aid to Haiti predictable for the next five years and to create a general policy framework for this assistance. The bill represents an important initiative to help Haiti recover, and we hope the legislation will be strengthened further by amendments providing more explicit emphases on agricultural and rural development and engagement of all parts of Haitian civil society in all sectors and at all levels.

In an earlier letter to the Administration, USCCB urged a substantial and sustained commitment by the U.S. government to provide long-term funding for reconstruction and poverty reduction in Haiti and called for a coherent strategy that coordinates different U.S. government agencies in a comprehensive approach, while engaging others with expertise and experience with Haiti. Your legislation addresses these needs. This integrated strategy included extension and improvement of the trade preferences through the Haiti Economic Lift Program Act and debt relief for Haiti, both of which have already been passed by Congress and signed by the President.

Encouraging transparency and accountability in local and national governments, as well as in other institutions, is essential to ensure that the funds your legislation authorizes are used for the benefit of the people and are not diverted or unduly delayed. For this reason, while affirming the Haitian government’s role and agreed upon coordinating mechanisms, we reiterate the need to ensure the inclusion of Haitian civil society, and when possible the Haitian Diaspora, at the outset in determining how U.S. and other international assistance should be implemented on the ground level. The role faith communities can play in this endeavor of accountability and inclusion is also important. Your bill laudably calls for support to the Haitian government in promoting sustainable urban development, but does not give sufficient attention to adequate and sustainable agricultural and rural development. We look forward to addressing these needs as the legislation moves forward.

Thank you for your leadership in tackling the long-term needs of Haiti. Be assured that USCCB and CRS look forward to working with the U.S. government, our Church partners, civil society, and a duly functioning Haitian government to help Haiti rebuild and develop.

Sincerely yours,

Most Reverend Howard J. Hubbard
Bishop of Albany
Chairman, Committee on International Justice and Peace

Ken Hackett
President
Catholic Relief Services

cc: Members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee