



The Episcopal Church



October 31, 2006

Dear Representative,

As leaders of our respective Churches and faith communities, we urge you and all Members of Congress to pass the *Haitian Hemispheric Opportunity through Partnership Encouragement (HOPE) Act of 2006* contained in H.R. 6142. We ask that you urge Congressional Leadership to schedule a vote on H.R. 6142 as soon as Congress reconvenes after the mid-term congressional elections.

Haiti is the poorest country in the western hemisphere, with 80 percent of the population living in abject poverty as a result of decades of suffering in the face of political unrest and social instability. Per-capita yearly income stands at just \$440 and the inflation rate is 20 percent. More than seven in ten people are unemployed, and 55 percent of the population is illiterate. Forty-two percent of children under the age of five are malnourished, and the health-care system is inadequately equipped to address the destabilizing effects of increasing HIV/AIDS rates.

Despite this legacy of poverty, the present moment offers great hope that Haiti is on the path to deeper security for its people and the entire region. President Préval has undertaken bold initiatives for reform that include combating drug transshipment, lawlessness, and violent crime. These initiatives are essential to the future prosperity and security of the Haitian people, particularly when coupled with steps to generate employment and economic development. **The HOPE Act contained in H.R. 6142 will enhance Haiti's efforts toward economic progress.**

The HOPE Act gives Haiti preferential access to the U.S. market, a critical step that will attract investment in Haiti, create jobs and help tackle Haiti's crippling poverty and instability. Stability will not take root in Haiti without economic development and the textile and apparel sector – the segment of the economy that would benefit most from the HOPE Act – offers the best opportunity for job creation.

Moreover, according to a recent study by the U.S. Agency for International Development, the HOPE Act would have no adverse impact on U.S. manufacturers. In fact, Haiti is an important importer of American products ranging from rice and chickens to automobiles and computers. For every dollar sent to Haiti, one dollar and thirty-four cents comes back.

As Christians, we confess a faith that sees the power of resurrection and rebirth even in the midst of the most overpowering death and loss. Americans share a special bond of friendship with the Haitian people that stems from our moral obligation to be good neighbors to those in need. The HOPE Act contained in H.R. 6142 offers meaningful economic incentives to help the Haitian people continue along the path of development and peace. We urge you, as Members of Congress, to pass the meaningful trade preferences for Haiti contained in H.R. 6142 immediately upon reconvening.

With prayerful good wishes for your work on behalf of the Haitian people, we remain

Sincerely yours,

Most Reverend Frank T. Griswold, Presiding Bishop and Primate, The Episcopal Church

The Reverend Mark S. Hanson, Presiding Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

The Reverend Felix Ortiz-Cotto, United Church of Christ-Christian Church, Disciples of Christ

Most Reverend Thomas G. Wenski, Chairman, Committee on International Policy, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

Mr. James E. Winkler, General Secretary, General Board of Church and Society, United Methodist Church