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May 4, 2010

The Honorable Max Baucus
511 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles E. Grassley
135 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Baucus and Senator Grassley:

Thank you for sponsoring the Haiti Economic Lift Program Act (S 3275). The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and Catholic Relief Services (CRS) strongly support this bipartisan bill which—in the midst of so much desperation—will send a clear signal that the United States is prepared to take the necessary steps to improve the lives of thousands of Haitians both in the short-term and in the long-term. We encourage the Senate to move the bill quickly through the legislative process.

As you may know, USCCB and CRS, the Catholic community's relief and development agency, took immediate and urgent steps to respond to the earthquake in Haiti by providing direct humanitarian assistance. USCCB also wrote to the Administration recommending that the U.S. government adopt a coherent strategy for long-term sustainable rebuilding and development that coordinates different U.S. Government agencies in an integrated approach, engaging other groups with expertise and experience with Haiti.

A critically important part of the integrated strategy we recommended was the extension and improvement of the trade preference levels (TPLs) that Haiti was granted through the Haitian Hemispheric Opportunity through Partnership Encouragement Acts (HOPE I and HOPE II), which our Conference strongly supported. We note that your bill increases the TPLs through 2020 and extends the value-added rule through 2018 with some provisions. The light manufacturing sector was not as damaged as other parts of Port-au-Prince during the earthquake and thus could generate desperately needed employment. Thousands of jobs will be quickly created in Haiti if this legislation passes. It will give investors and retailers a clear signal that the United States has a strong commitment to help Haiti recover and rebuild, especially the Haitian economy, in the long-term.

Thank you for your leadership in recognizing the need for a long-term and strong commitment to help Haiti recover and move toward human development and poverty reduction. Be assured that the Conference of Bishops and Catholic Relief Services will continue to do everything possible to stand in solidarity with the people of Haiti as they begin to rebuild their country.

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 Senate Finance Committee