



Haitian Women for Haitian Refugees

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Leogane, Haiti

Photo courtesy of Dahoud Andre.

Haitian Women for Haitian Refugees (HWHR) was founded in 1992 to respond to the human needs of Haitian refugees and immigrants arriving in the United States after fleeing persecution. Through education, leadership development and collective action, HWHR members empower themselves as they struggle for social and economic justice.

Over the past decade, HWHR has also provided solidarity support to communities in Haiti to recover and rebuild in the wake of natural and man-made disasters.

January 2011

HWHR Assists Members Through Uncertain Times

Marie-C. has been attending Survival English classes at HWHR since September 2009. "When I started, I could not converse with someone who spoke English," she said. "Now, anything I need, I can ask." Her teacher, Ruth-Marie Charles, notices Marie-C.'s sense of determination. "She has perfect attendance, and she asks a lot of questions. She pushes, and works hard to enrich herself."

Learning English is a vital skill for Marie-C., who recently received her work authorization through the Temporary Protected Status program for previously undocumented Haitians living in the United States before the January 2010 earthquake. HWHR provided financial assistance to help Marie-C. and other clients complete the application process.

"Thanks to the emergency funds

that we have raised through individual donors since the earthquake, we were able to help a few of our clients with unexpected expenses and immigration fees," said HWHR's Executive Director Ninaj Raoul.



60 new students have enrolled in HWHR's Survival English classes, since the earthquake.

"Although in many cases there were free legal help and fee waivers were available for TPS applicants, people still have to pay \$340 to obtain employment authorization," Raoul explained, pointing out that this payment amount can be a hardship, since applicants usually don't have steady income.

While Temporary Protected Status

brought some relief at first, uncertainty mounts each day for Marie-C.

She is currently looking for work and housing. She wants to be able to support her three children in Haiti, ages 27, 21, and 14 who narrowly survived the earthquake when the house they were living in collapsed. Several of her family members died in the earthquake and its aftermath, including her mother. The losses Marie-C. is coping with are shared by many of HWHR's clients.

TPS provides some opportunities for those who were living out-of-status to work and apply for benefits such as Medicaid, but the short window of protection (18-months) is a source of stress. Marie-C. worries that at the end of next year, she will be living in fear of being deported.

"I would like to see the US government give people residency, so you can [go back to Haiti and] visit your family. TPS is temporary. After TPS, we will be living in stress because we know they can always send us away." §

The Irony of Temporary Protected Status (TPS)

On January 18, 2010, U.S. Homeland Security secretary Napolitano offered Temporary Protected Status to Haitian nationals that were living out of status in the United States prior to the January 12th Earthquake. But earthquake refugees are at risk of becoming the newest undocumented group.

What's wrong with TPS?

- It only applies to those who were living in the US before January 12.
- It does not provide a path to permanent residency. It is intended to be temporary.
- The current TPS term will expire on July 22, 2011. When the term expires, the US government can decide not to extend it.
- Some Haitians who qualify for TPS are afraid to apply, because they fear exposing themselves to immigration authorities could lead to deportation.
- Earthquake refugees are not eligible for TPS, and many are here on visitor's visas.

Why are visitor's visas wrong for earthquake refugees?

- Visitors visas do not permit their holders to obtain employment authorization.
- Once the visas expire, some people only have tents to go home to; others will choose to overstay, and live in fear.

What kind of immigration relief do earthquake refugees need?

- Refugees of the earthquake should be entitled to on-going medical care, treatment for psychological trauma, the chance to continue their education, and work eligibility.
- Haitian immigrants should be offered immigration relief with a path to permanent residency - through the Cuban/Haitian Entrant program or an extension of the Haitian Refugee Immigration Fairness Act.

On December 9, 2010, Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE), announced that it will resume deportations of Haitian nationals in criminal proceedings, in spite of worsening post - earthquake conditions in Haiti.

Haitian Rape Victims Seek Humanitarian Relief

Haitian Women for Haitian Refugees is working with Morrison and Foerster law firm and a coalition of lawyers and women's groups on the Humanitarian Parole for Haitian Women Project, to provide immigration relief and emergency social services to Haitian victims of sexual violence.

Rape is one of the ways that women and girls in Haiti are experiencing the worst of the post-earthquake conditions. In camps where there is no security and no privacy, women and girls are being attacked. In a July 2010 report by MADRE, based on interviews with 50 rape victims, many had been attacked by two or more men, under threat of weapons such as guns or knives. Some reported being raped on separate occasions, as they continued to live in unsafe conditions. The number of rapes is unknown and most go unreported. Human rights groups were able to track at least 230 cases of rape within the first two months after the earthquake.

The Humanitarian Parole for Haitian Women Project will attempt to secure Humanitarian Parole for Haitian rape victims and their children to receive healthcare and psychological services in the U.S. for one year.

The Federal Bar Council Public Service Committee is close to completing the application process for 25 women and their children, about 100 people total. These women were identified by Haitian organizations as rape victims, and were interviewed when lawyers went to Haiti in May.

While women's groups have been outspoken about this crisis, the Haitian government, UN occupying forces and the Haitian police have failed to respond. In many cases, the

Haitian police refuse to document the crimes or look for the perpetrators. There is no real punishment, so rapists continue to act with impunity.

After experiencing sexual violence, in addition to the traumas they have already faced in losing their homes, family members, and livelihoods, survivors of rape are at risk for severe depression and suicide. They also face health problems such as possible exposure to sexually transmitted disease, un-safe pregnancy, and internal injuries.

The Humanitarian Parole project reached out to HWHR to learn more about the organization's experiences working with parolees, dating back to our support for rape victims, and pregnant women who were HIV positive, coming from refugee detention in Guantanamo.

"HWHR has already been invaluable in giving us the benefit of their first hand experience. They have such a deep history and ties to Haitian community in New York," said Morrison and Foerster lawyer Jennifer Brown.

HWHR intern Nerline Malivert is currently assisting clients with the interview and application process, through our "Language is Power" program which trains young people to engage in social issues by providing Kreyol-English translation services.



HWHR Intern Nerline Malivert is a senior majoring in Women's Studies and Biochemistry at Hunter College..

The challenging part of the Humanitarian Parole application process is finding a sponsor for each family that applies. Applicants must be sponsored by someone who is willing to provide

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housing, food, clothing, and support for the family. "The first clients to complete the process will be those who have friends or family in the US who have already agreed to serve as their sponsors," said Brown.

"For those who don't have sponsors, we are looking for people to step up," said Brown. The coalition will soon hold forums in areas where there is a large Haitian community in order to find sponsors.

"It is important [for the incoming families] to feel tied into the Haitian community and supported by it," Brown explained. \$

If you are interested in sponsoring a family, please contact Jennifer Brown, Morrison and Foerster Law Firm: haitiproject@mofo.com

After the earthquake...

HWHR collaborated with Brooklyn community radio program Lakou New York, Flanwayan-Haitian Literacy Program, and the Kongo-Cultural Arts Project, to send volunteers who delivered relief supplies and provided emotional support to survivors of the earthquake.

Together the New York groups partnered with Movimiento de Mujeres Dominico- Haitiana (MUDHA) in Santo Domingo - collecting first aid supplies, personal hygiene items, and materials for health and cultural workshops. MUDHA was able to purchase large quantities of clean water, fresh food, tents, mattresses, and other pertinent materials in the Dominican Republic. They also provided medical staff, long term organizers, and youth facilitators to work in the camps.

To learn more about the earthquake response, please visit: haitianwomen.wordpress.com.

Thank You to the following funders and sponsors who have made grants to HWHR since January 2010:

Brooklyn Community Foundation-
NYC Haitian Hope & Healing Fund
North Star Fund
Durst Family Foundation
New York Community Trust-
Fund for New Citizens
Loop Capital
United African Organization
Mia Phifer and Associates
Marymount School of New York
Friends of Kwame Raoul
Klausner/Bass
Time of Day Productions
Common Cents Foundation
Morrison Forester Foundation
United Nations International School
F.B. Heron Foundation
The Saturday Stitches Sew-ciety, Inc
Surdna Foundation
Open Meadows Foundation
Darsene Baggett
Edwidge Danticat
The Legacy Circle
Illinois Arts Alliance



Women participate in a jewelry-making workshop conducted by HWHR at MUDHA's camp in Leogane.

HWHR is especially grateful to all the individuals and organizations who have given generous donations and time over the years. We survive because of your solidarity and financial support.



MUDHA brings women together to discuss community concerns.



Members of Kole Zepol distribute backpacks for school children in Cite Soleil.



"Back to Basics" kits were donated by Frances Xavier Warde School in Chicago, IL.



On September 7, 2010, our mentor and friend Reverend Lucius Walker passed on. As the Director of our fiscal sponsor IFCO/Pastors for Peace, Reverend Walker provided years of direct support, guidance, and powerful examples of true grassroots community organizing.

Lucius was committed to seeing justice for the poor throughout the Americas. He showed his love for Haiti by sponsoring 12 doctors from the Latin American Medical School to serve after the earthquake. The memory of his courage and gentle spirit will always be with us.



Dr. Narciso Ortíz (at left) is one of four 2010 U.S. graduates of the Latin American School of Medicine (LASM) working with the Cuban medical teams in Haiti as they battle the cholera epidemic there. IFCO administers the full scholarship program for U.S. students attending LASM.

-Text and photo courtesy of IFCO.



Photo courtesy of MUDHA.

Construction is nearly finished on the Asosiyasyon Fanm pou Devlopman Kominote (Womens Center for Community Development), which is being developed and administered by MUDHA in collaboration with other women's organizations. The center is a safe place for local women's groups to gather and provide community workshops, and will provide shelter to 35 women and children.

How you can help:

You can organize your family, neighbors, friends, or co-workers to make a difference by collecting urgently needed items for MUDHA's Women's Community Development Center in Leogane.

We are collecting the following items:

- Water purification tablets
- Soap and toothpaste
- Brand new underwear - for children and adults (S, M sizes)
- Baby diapers in all sizes
- Small LED flashlights and lanterns
- AA and AAA batteries
- Safety whistles
- Jewelry-making supplies

For more information, visit:

haitianwomen.wordpress.com