

Remarks at the International Donors Conference on Haiti

By
James D. Wolfensohn
President
The World Bank Group
Washington, D.C., July 20, 2004

Thank you very much, Enrique, and, Mr. Prime Minister, senior representatives from Haiti, representatives of the donor community, civil society and all friends in this effort.

When I read again last night the Interim Cooperation Framework, I was struck by the fact that in recent years I'm used to coming before such gatherings talking about a "Needs Assessment," and I was struck by the different title that this is an Interim Cooperation Framework. It's not a Needs Assessment.

And indeed the very essence of what we are here for today is not just putting up the funds, critical as that is and important as it is, but it is to have a Cooperation Framework that will allow the Haitian leadership, both governmental and civil society, and the international community to come together and cooperate to try and bring about the objectives that have been so eloquently addressed by the early speakers this morning.

And it is in that context that we in the Bank feel privileged to be a part of this framework and to have participated in the very urgent activity of putting together the plan, under the leadership of our Haitian colleagues, that is before you and that was discussed so extensively yesterday. We are very happy indeed to be here with you as a small part of this exercise.

And we, like many of you, have done our own analysis of the past and of the future. And we have concluded, as I think happened yesterday, and as all of us have done independently, that there have been many problems in the past, perhaps on both sides, in Haiti and from the donor community itself, and that if we join together now, as we must, then we should profit from those mistakes not wallow in them, not flagellate ourselves, but benefit from them and move forward. And it's in that spirit, Mr. Prime Minister, that I think we're all here today.

And may I say that there is no more clear statement of both the history and the future than appears this morning under your name, sir, in the Washington Post. And for those of you that have not read this article, I commend it to you because it gives very clearly the background and the perception of Prime Minister Latortue in relation to the future.

And it states of course the realities that all of us are aware of, but does it succinctly and impressively, that Haiti is, as you know, the poorest country in this hemisphere, that half the population has no access to safe water, that 5 percent of the population lives with HIV/AIDS, that on any of the human statistics that one addresses, whether it be education or health or access to public services, Haiti is close to or at the bottom of the list in terms of the services that are provided and the access for the individuals in that country.

But what also comes out, and for those of you that saw the Smithsonian exhibition recently here in Washington, this is a people with a long and proud history--200 years of independence, a history of a commitment to education. One has only to know Haitian women to know their preoccupation in terms of children and education of children. You have only to know something of the culture, both the visual arts, the performing arts, and the literary history of that country to know that here is a country that is crying out for the partnership that we are addressing, crying out for the opportunity to provide a future, as the Secretary of State said, a future of hope for the children of Haiti.

And have a framework which, after reviewing 10 individual groups that addressed the issues that are facing the country, came down with, as you all know, four thematic axes:

The strengthening of governance, and the promoting of a national dialogue. And of course nothing is more important than to return security to the country so that people can live in security and hope. The improvement of the, indeed, in many ways the refurbishment and recreation of a judicial system in which people can have confidence, the restoration of the basic laws that would give people their civil rights, and the preparation, as has been said, for the municipal and national elections;

And access to the strengthening the economic governance and contributing to the institutional development. There isn't one of us I think who is free from the past criticism of not having helped so much Haitian colleagues in building an institutional framework. Too many of us have been concerned with flags and individual projects and too little with the constructive work of building institutions within the framework of an economic plan which has been so well articulated. And as has been said earlier, the issues of building capacity have to be at the forefront of that activity;

The promoting of economic activity is the third of the axes and the rehabilitation of the vital infrastructures. When one reads the report and says that in the next 10 years we're looking to build the access of electricity from 10 to 50 percent, one realizes just how low a point we are starting from, that the aspirations don't start at 50 and build up, they start at 10 to build to 50 over the next 10 years. And you could say the same for water, and you could say the same for health services, and you can say the same for education, with 500,000 children not in school.

So we are starting here with a country which, as you read this impressive report, you really look at almost every one of the traditional sectors

that we look at as one comes to the development activity, and they are not just one or two or three holes that need to be filled.

In almost every sector of society, we find that we're starting at a low point and need to build up. And we need to build up in a coherent and quick way. As was mentioned earlier, the problem of being able to absorb this and do this quickly presents a challenge that the Haitian people alone, both in government and civil society, cannot do alone. And here, Mr. Ambassador, your role as a link in terms of the United Nations and the support that we can give becomes very important.

And that leads of course to axis four, to set the infrastructure in place for power, for roads, for health, for education systems and, importantly in the report, to ensure that there is a preservation of the culture that is so rich in the country and of the environment, which is also so potentially rich as it was in the past, as the Prime Minister has pointed out in his statement in the Washington Post in terms of history as a tourist destination, but a country now which is ravaged by 97-percent deforestation, in a country that used to take pride in its forests and where reforestation now becomes such an essential element.

So we have a lot to do, and we have a lot to do together. And we put a price tag of over \$900 million on this, and I'm happy to say that my own institution will later announce \$150-million contribution from IDA funding towards the bridging of this gap.

But it is not just money, and it's not just an identification of the problems. We need to go out of here today with a resolution that under the leadership, at the moment, of Prime Minister Latortue and with the preparation for the elections, that we're here for the long term, that we're here as a united family, that we're not here as individuals with our individual flags, but that we're here to come together under Haitian leadership with the sort of support that they need. And I believe, Mr. Prime Minister, that this remarkable group of people that have turned out, yesterday and today, and may I say so remarkably efficiently in terms of getting here on time and being here throughout the proceedings, is an indication I think of the seriousness with which people are approaching the issue. And I think you can take it that this group that is before you are ready to be your partners in the Cooperation Agreement and making it effective. And so it is with great pleasure, Mr. Prime Minister, that I would ask you to speak to us.

I think all of you here know of the background of the Prime Minister, with his period as an economist, as a representative of his country as Foreign Minister, of a period in the United Nations that was extraordinarily constructive, and his recent residence in Florida, successfully living his life as an expatriate, he recognized that the real challenge was to return to the country in which he was born and to help it in its reconstruction. And we are very proud, Mr. Prime Minister, that you made that decision, and we're all greatly encouraged by the work that you have already done.

So it's with great pleasure that I introduce the Prime Minister to speak to you.

