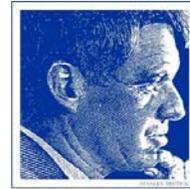




Partners
In Health



RFK MEMORIAL
CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact:

CHRGJ: Margaret Satterthwaite, Faculty Director, (212) 998-6657 (English)

Partners in Health: Andrew Marx, Director of Communications, (617) 432-1976 (English)

RFK Memorial Center: Monika Kalra Varma, Director, (202) 460-4681 (English)

Zanmi Lasante: Loune Viaud, Director, (617) 459-0760 (English, French, and Kreyol)

Rights Groups Launch Groundbreaking Report on Right to Water in Haiti

Groups Allege U.S. and the IDB Violated Rights by Obstructing Vital Water Projects

(NEW YORK, June 23, 2008)—Lack of access to clean water in Haiti has devastating health consequences and constitutes a clear violation of Haitians' right to water according to both domestic and international legal obligations, claims a new report released today by the Center for Human Rights and Global Justice (CHRGJ), Partners In Health (PIH), the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Center (RFK Center), and *Zanmi Lasante*. The release of the report, "*Wòch nan Soley: The Denial of the Right to Water in Haiti*," comes just months after public outrage over rising food prices led to a full-blown political crisis in Haiti.

The 87-page report—which combines health and water data gathered on the ground in Haiti, legal analysis, and discussion of the historical context—presents the findings of a joint project conducted by the groups, who worked together to research, author, and release it. The groups used human rights and public health methodologies to assess the right to water in Haiti by surveying community members, testing water sources, and meeting with community leaders and government officials.

One of the report's main findings is of an undeniable link between the international community's political interference and the intolerably poor state of potable water in Haiti. Using documents obtained by the RFK Center through a Freedom of Information Act lawsuit against the U.S. Treasury Department, the report exposes the U.S. government's role in blocking the disbursement of millions of dollars in loans that would have had life-saving consequences for the Haitian people. The loans, which the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) approved in 1998 for urgently needed water and sanitation projects in Haiti, were derailed in 2001 by politically-motivated, behind-the-scenes interventions on behalf of the United States and other members of the international community.

“When an institution takes on the responsibility to improve water and health conditions, it cannot turn around and undermine the rights of the people it was established to serve, regardless of pressure from one of its most powerful members,” said Monika Kalra Varma, Director of the RFK Center. “To keep history from repeating itself, the IDB and the U.S. government must take responsibility for their actions and put in place transparency and oversight mechanisms to guarantee that the human rights of the people of Haiti and other IDB member states will not be violated by an institution mandated to support their economic and social development.”

When the Bank halted disbursement, it violated its own charter, which strictly prohibits it from allowing politics to influence its decisions. This has been common practice, according to Loune Viaud, Director of Operations for Zanmi Lasante and recipient of the 2002 RFK Human Rights Award. “The international community is able to turn a blind eye to the impact of its policies because it is not forced to confront the human faces of those who die or become ill through its action or inaction. This report shows the devastating human rights impacts of its policies.”

While exposing the link between violations of Haitians’ human rights and the international community’s actions, the report also provides a clear framework of concrete rights and duties that should be followed by all actors involved in Haiti. Such actions include strengthening the Haitian government’s ability to regulate the private water sector; ensuring that all water projects respond to the needs of the most impoverished Haitians; and obtaining informed consent from community members concerning improvements in the water systems that are meant to serve them.

“Although the Haitian government is the primary guarantor of rights in Haiti, the international community is not without obligations,” said Prof. Margaret Satterthwaite, Faculty Director of the CHRGJ. “The states that make up the international community have a duty not to harm or undermine human rights—including through their actions as members of international financial institutions. In this case, the international community effectively crippled the Haitian government’s ability to fulfill one of the most basic subsistence rights due to all people—the right to water.”

Haiti is not only the most impoverished country in the Western Hemisphere, it also has some of the worst water in the world, ranking 147th out of 147 countries in the Water Poverty Index. The report, which contains detailed data obtained through an in-depth scientific study of water in the coastal city of Port-de-Paix, shows the devastating consequences that the lack of access to clean and safe water has on the population studied. Like the majority of the Haitian people, the population of Port-de-Paix lacks accessible, affordable, and safe potable water.

“In my years as a doctor in rural Haiti, I have witnessed the tragic relationship between lack of access to clean water and preventable disease,” said Dr. Evan Lyon, one of the project’s primary investigators from PIH. “This survey opened my eyes to how essential clean water is to all facets of life, from cooking and washing, to growing food and the ability of children to attend school. When even water at the local hospital—which is meant to treat people who have fallen ill with water-related diseases—comes from the very same contaminated sources that first made those patients ill, one begins to grasp the dangerous relationship dirty water has with all aspects of survival.”

The four organizations that authored the report are committed to working together to find ways to transform the findings into action. The report's title, "Wòch nan Soley" comes from a proverb in Haitian Kreyol lamenting that, "the rocks in the water don't know the suffering of the rocks in the sun." In other words, the wealthy do not know the suffering of the poor. According to Viaud, this is precisely what needs to change. "We must strive to hold our governments, and the institutions to which they belong, accountable. And we must commit to ensuring that the right to water is realized in rich and poor countries alike. It is time for all actors in Haiti to put the rights of the Haitian people first."

The organizations involved hope that the report will contribute to real policy changes by compelling international financial institutions, national governments, and other entities to understand that respect for human rights is inextricably linked to resource and development issues and, crucially, that they are legally obligated to respect, protect, and fulfill those rights.

To read the full report or to find additional background materials, please see:

["Woch nan Soley"](http://www.chrgj.org) at www.chrgj.org

["Woch nan Soley"](http://www.pih.org) at www.pih.org

["Woch nan Soley"](http://www.rfkmemorial.org) at www.rfkmemorial.org

Translated versions of the report—in French and Haitian Kreyol—will also be available soon.

About the CHRGJ

The Center for Human Rights and Global Justice (CHRGJ) brings together and expands the rich array of teaching, research, clinical, internship, and publishing activities undertaken within New York University (NYU) School of Law on international human rights issues. It has been working with the RFK Center and Zanmi Lasante for five years to advance economic and social rights in Haiti through cutting-edge research and advocacy projects.

About PIH and Zanmi Lasante

Partners In Health (PIH) began just over two decades ago, when Dr. Paul Farmer was working in a small medical clinic in the rural village of Cange, Haiti in collaboration with the local Haitian community. Today, PIH and its sister organization, Zanmi Lasante (ZL), have become one of the largest health care providers in central Haiti, reaching a catchment area of nearly one million people. Zanmi Lasante, is an independently-registered local organization that employs more than 3,000 people and is the largest provider of comprehensive health care services in central Haiti.

About RFK Center

The Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Center for Human Rights (RFK Center) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit charitable organization that is dedicated to advancing the human rights movement through innovative partnerships with courageous human rights defenders around the world. RFK Center has been working with Zanmi Lasante and PIH since Loune Viaud, the Director of Strategic Planning at Zanmi Lasante received the RFK Human Rights Award in 2002. RFK Center and Viaud have worked in partnership over the last six years to transform the international community's interventions in Haiti, many of which undermine human rights, including the right to health. They have launched aggressive advocacy plans for government

accountability in international financial institutions and to ensure that funds entering Haiti are implemented within a human rights framework.

#