

## **WHY HAITI MATTERS**

IRD Staff Meeting, January 22, 2010

Arthur B. Keys, President & CEO

The earthquake that shook Haiti on January 12, 2009 shook all of us. Many of us have worked in Haiti over the years and have colleagues and friends there. The tremors were felt in our office. We waited for days to learn of the whereabouts of our former colleague, Rick Santos as he lay under tons of rubble. We were visibly relieved by his miraculous rescue and thankful for his safe return. At the same time, we were saddened by the death of two good friends of IRD: Sam Dixon, head of the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) and Clint Rabb, UMCOR Director of Volunteers who were trapped with Rick. And we are thankful that Frantz Colon did not lose any members of his immediate family.

As you know, IRD has organized a quick and effective response. We now have six staff persons on the ground; Adam Koons, Lloyd Rollins, Igor Samac, Yvette Gonzalez-Sharma, Rich Wagner and James Jean, our Cameroon Country Director who is from Haiti. And at HQ we have a great Haiti Task Force under Lali Chania's direction. We have already distributed two truckloads of water. And we have collected and are in the process of shipping \$6 million worth of in-kind commodities for the local Haitian partners of IRD: Help for a Healthier Humanity, Haiti Lumiere, Medical Education Development and Training, and ADRA-Haiti. IRD contributed \$4 million to these groups last year.

The mission of IRD "is to reduce the suffering of the world's most vulnerable groups and provide tools and resources needed to increase their self-sufficiency." We have a commendable track record of results as we helped the Acehnese people recover from the tsunami. And we are currently the most active NGO working to rebuild the Mississippi Gulf Coast after the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. The mission of IRD will be challenged and fulfilled many times over in the coming months and years as we help the Haitian people recover and rebuild. IRD is in Haiti for the long haul.

IRD is operating many important programs in 41 countries throughout the world. Each one of them is addressing pressing human needs. And we are actively pursuing major new programs and procurements with an aggressive plan of new business development. We will continue to pursue all of these programs and plans with vigor and purpose. At the same time we will make organizational adjustments to address the heartbreaking tragedy on our doorstep in Haiti.

Why does Haiti matter? President Obama stated it well. "Above all, we act for a very simple reason: in times of tragedy, the United States of America steps forward and helps. That is who we are. That is what we do. . . every American can look at this relief effort with the pride of knowing that America is acting on behalf of our common humanity."

The simple reason Haiti matters to IRD is that in times of tragedy, we step forward and help. That is who we are, this is what we do. And it is why IRD is the premier development agency in the world. The IRD response in Haiti shows not only our

compassion, it shows our leadership and character. This is how we act on behalf of our common humanity.

IRD has a major contribution to make to alleviate short-term suffering. But we have the demonstrated capacity and commitment to make an even greater contribution to the long-term recovery and rebuilding of Haiti. Let us all work together to support our team in Haiti. Let us work together to secure the resources to make a lasting impact for Haiti's future.

The Haitian people have great resilience and spirit. In 1791 at the same time that the American republic was launched and the rest of the Americas were still colonies, the Haitian Revolution, one of history's rare successful slave revolts, was launched. Insurgents gathered in a forest called the Bois Caiman to swear a blood oath. A passage from Revolutionary Freedoms reads, "The wind was wailing. Heavy drops of rain were falling from a dark and cloudy sky on the ragged leaves of trees, on the group of men dancing slowly to the sounds of Vodou drum beats."

The story of Bois Caiman and the successful fight for freedom and independence from France inspires Haitians today. Let us listen in this time of dark and cloudy skies for the sounds of Vodou drum beats. This music from the Haitian people will stir us into action and inspire all of us. IRD will work as a partner to harness the energy of that resilience and spirit so that we build, back better.

#