

Haiti Debt Relief Hearing

March 4, 2010

Rep. Meeks Prepared Statement

Before I begin, I would like to thank ranking member Miller for his help in organizing this very important hearing on Haiti debt relief. I also want to thank all our witnesses who have taken the time to come share their valued experience on the topic of debt relief for Haiti.

Today, we will consider an issue that is close to all of our hearts. Haiti suffered a devastating earthquake on January 12 of this year. The country, which was finally making strides to more stable economic growth and whose government was finally showing signs of becoming more stable, credible and accountable, was rocked by a natural disaster of historic proportions. The images from the disaster are fresh in our minds. The immediate needs of the people are clear, and the desire of the global community, and of average American citizens to help Haiti recover as fast as possible are clear and give me hope. This is a bipartisan issue because it is

a human issue, at its most basic. This is about America showing its true compassion and capacity to help our neighbors in their time of greatest need. Average American citizens mobilized to help Haiti in a way that gives me great pride in my country. Our government stepped up to the challenge in the immediate aftermath. We are now moving to the second and third phase of the process; namely moving from immediate rescue and survival concerns, though they are still critical, to reconstruction and, ultimately, long-term economic recovery. A critical step to this transition will be providing Haiti with debt relief, and working with the multilateral development banks and the IMF to ensure that Haiti will be provided the resources it needs in the medium and longer term, without adding to the nation's debt burden.

I look forward to hearing the testimony of our witnesses here today, and look forward to working with ranking member Miller on moving a bill to empower the administration to promote Haiti debt relief from the international institutions in which we are major shareholders, as well as pushing for bilateral debt relief from other nations holding Haiti's debts today.

Finally, I did want to inform you that this will be just the first in a series of hearings focused on Haiti. As some of you know, I

chaired a bipartisan, members-only briefing on multilateral aid and financing coordination in February, at which the Treasury Department, the IDB, the World Bank and the IMF provided clarity into how they plan to collaborate to ensure efficiency and to eliminate waste and duplication of efforts in their work in Haiti. The next hearing is scheduled for March 16, and will focus on the longer-term prospects and strategy for Haiti's economic recovery. Long after the news cameras have left, we will continue to monitor progress in Haiti, and to provide assistance to ensure that the nation can get back on its feet, and back on a path to economic growth and political stability.