Situation in Haiti one year after the earthquake: humanitarian aid and reconstruction

European Parliament resolution of 19 January 2011 on the situation in Haiti one year after the earthquake: humanitarian aid and reconstruction

The European Parliament,

– having regard to the International Donors’ Conference Towards a New Future for Haiti, held in New York on 31 March 2010, and to the New York mission report of the delegation from Parliament’s Committee on Development,


– having regard to the conclusions of the extraordinary Foreign Affairs Council meeting held in Brussels on 18 January 2010,

– having regard to the statement on the Haiti earthquake made by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on 19 January 2010,

– having regard to the conclusions of the preparatory ministerial conference held in Montreal on 25 January 2010,

– having regard to the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid signed by the three EU institutions in December 2007,

– having regard to its resolution of 10 February 2010 on the recent earthquake in Haiti¹,

– having regard to the report on the mission to Haiti of Parliament’s Committee on Development (25-27 June 2010),

– having regard to the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly’s report of 30 August 2010 on the fact-finding mission to Haiti and the Dominican Republic,

– having regard to the June 2010 joint document issued by Catherine Ashton, Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and Commissioner Kristalina Georgieva on the lessons to be learned from the EU response to the disaster in Haiti,

– having regard to the Commission communication of 26 October 2010 entitled ‘Towards a stronger European disaster response: the role of civil protection and humanitarian assistance’ (COM(2010)0600),

– having regard to the United Nations Stabilisation Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH),

having regard to the report by Michel Barnier entitled ‘For a European civil protection force: Europe aid’, published in May 2006,

having regard to Rule 110(4) of its Rules of Procedure,

A. whereas the earthquake measuring 7.3 on the Richter scale which struck Haiti on 12 January 2010 killed 222,750 people, affected 3 million and displaced nearly 1.7 million, more than a million of whom are still living in makeshift camps that were supposed to be temporary, and whereas human rights associations continue to deplore the ‘appalling’ living conditions in these camps, in particular the ‘rape and sexual violence’ to which women are subjected,

B. whereas 2.5-3.3 million people are currently ‘food insecure’, in a country where 60% of the population lives in rural areas and 80% lives in absolute poverty,

C. whereas, a year on from the earthquake, the situation in Haiti remains chaotic, the country is still in a state of emergency and reconstruction work has barely started,

D. whereas decades of poverty, environmental deterioration, vulnerability to various natural disasters, violence, political instability and dictatorship have left Haiti the most impoverished country in the Americas, with most of its population of 12 million surviving on less than USD 2 per day before the disaster, and whereas the earthquake damage has further undermined the state’s ability to provide basic public services and thus to play an active role in the relief and reconstruction efforts,

E. whereas to date only USD 1.2 billion of the USD 10 billion dollars pledged (with two deadlines: 18 months and three years) at the International Donors’ Conference for the reconstruction of Haiti, held in New York on 31 March 2010, has actually been paid,

F. whereas the recent tragedy in Haiti has demonstrated that the tools available to the EU for responding to disasters (humanitarian aid and the Community Civil Protection Mechanism) need to be improved in terms of their effectiveness, speed, coordination and visibility,

G. whereas the Interim Haiti Recovery Commission (IHRC) was set up at Haiti’s request to coordinate the resources and ensure that they are used effectively, and to implement the Action Plan for National Recovery and Development of Haiti; whereas the Commission, as the leading donor, is a voting member of the IHRC,

H. whereas clearing the rubble is a major challenge in connection with the reconstruction of the country (only a tiny proportion has been cleared), and whereas at the current rate of progress it would take at least six years to remove the millions of cubic metres of rubble,

I. whereas the cholera epidemic that broke out on 19 October 2010 has claimed more than 3,000 lives to date and affected more than 150,000 people, whereas the spread of the epidemic has highlighted the obvious structural shortcomings of the Haitian State and the limitations of the international aid system and of MINUSTAH, and whereas the cholera response effort is being hampered by – among other things – the current political crisis in the wake of the elections,

J. whereas the UN has received only USD 44 million of the USD 174 million for which it appealed to fight the cholera epidemic,
K. whereas the WHO is predicting 400 000 new cholera cases over the next 12 months if the epidemic is not eradicated,

L. whereas the elections of 28 November 2010, the provisional results of which were announced in early December, sparked violent demonstrations in Haiti and numerous complaints of fraud, whereas the international community must support a transparent and fair election process in order to guarantee the clean elections that are essential for the reconstruction of the country, and whereas protecting the civilian population must be a priority,

1. Reiterates its solidarity with the people of Haiti suffering as a result of the earthquake and the cholera epidemic, and stresses that reconstruction efforts must involve the consultation of, and include, the Haitian people and Haitian civil society;

2. Urges a strong, long-term commitment from the international community, including the EU, to honour all the pledges made at the International Donors’ Conference in New York and to deliver the funds without delay; stresses, further, that all EU humanitarian and reconstruction assistance must be provided in the form of grants rather than loans which have to be paid back;

3. Recalls the international community's massive response to the devastating earthquake in Haiti, and its genuine political will to take a new approach to supporting the reconstruction of the country – without repeating the errors of the past – and to tackle the deep-rooted causes of poverty in Haiti once and for all;

4. Laments the scale of the disaster in Haiti, the effects of which are still highly visible a year on from the earthquake; welcomes the extent of the humanitarian aid granted to Haiti by the Commission (EUR 120 million, including EUR 12 million to fight cholera) and the Member States (approximately EUR 200 million), and the commitment shown by the Commissioner for International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response and by DG ECHO and its experts;

5. Stresses that the establishment of ‘clusters’ has made it possible to coordinate humanitarian efforts on the ground, but that this approach has revealed its limitations in the face of the huge number of humanitarian agencies involved and the complex nature of the emergency owing to Haiti’s high urban population density;

6. Commends the efforts and achievements of humanitarian organisations (the Red Cross, NGOs and the United Nations) and the Member States, and stresses the need to communicate the non-visible effects of humanitarian work and the fact that the situation was brought under control thanks to, inter alia, the provision of care for the injured, drinking water, food and temporary shelter;

7. Notes that the cholera epidemic has highlighted the near-total helplessness of the Haitian State in the face of an easily preventable and treatable disease, along with the limitations of the international aid system in a country benefiting from a massive humanitarian deployment (12 000 NGOs); stresses that humanitarian agencies cannot and must not continue to make up for for the weaknesses of the Haitian State or to take its place, and that urgent action must finally be taken to ensure long-term development, in particular as regards access to healthcare and drinking water and urban renewal;
8. Welcomes the collective commitment made by the Commission and the Member States at the International Donors’ Conference for the reconstruction of Haiti to donate a total of EUR 1.2 billion, including EUR 460 million in non-humanitarian aid from the Commission; reiterates its call for the EU, as the leading donor, to exercise political leadership in the context of the reconstruction effort;

9. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to incorporate local food production and food security into the reconstruction effort in Haiti, via the development of rural infrastructure and the provision of aid to small farmers, in the context of their joint approach to programming their resources for reconstruction in Haiti and of the mid-term review of the programming of the remaining Commission funds, i.e. the EUR 169 million still to be allocated from the EUR 460 million announced in New York; calls for the implementation of the new food security policy framework announced by the Commission in March 2010;

10. Deplores the late start to the work of the IHRC, which should be playing a central role in coordinating reconstruction; is disappointed at the lack of information concerning its operation and effectiveness, and calls on the Commission, as a member of the IHRC, to intervene with a view to speeding up the implementation of the latter’s mandate and reviewing its operation and to submit a report to Parliament on the IHRC’s activities, its use of resources and the proportion of the funds pledged at the New York conference that has actually been committed to reconstruction;

11. Acknowledges that the effective operation of the IHRC, as the central body responsible for managing the reconstruction effort, is contingent on rebuilding the capacity of the Haitian State and renewing Haiti’s political leadership following transparent and fair elections, and on a genuine political will to take the decisions that will have to be made before embarking on this gigantic project;

12. Urges the Haitian Government to stand by and implement the commitments made in the Action Plan for National Recovery and Development of Haiti to strengthen the state’s authority, make local government more effective, build the capacity of local and national institutions and incorporate the concept of political, economic and institutional decentralisation;

13. Takes the view that both local authorities and civil society representatives should be better supported and more involved in the decision-making process;

14. Deplores the fact that the Haitians have only shovels, pickaxes and wheelbarrows with which to clear the tonnes of rubble now strewn throughout the capital, which seems totally inadequate in view of the gravity of the situation; stresses that removing the rubble is essential to the reconstruction of Haiti, and is disappointed that hardly any funds have been released for this purpose; calls on the Commission to provide financial aid and technical support for the removal of rubble;

15. Calls on the UN to review MINUSTAH’s mandate, with a particular focus on security issues, and is concerned about its effectiveness in the light of the latest events (the cholera epidemic and the elections in progress);

16. Deplores the serious housing crisis in Haiti; stresses that rehousing of the homeless, most of whom are living in makeshift camps set up mainly in the capital, Port-au-Prince, is being hampered by a lack of available land, the absence of clear land ownership rules and the fact
that many plots of land are owned by expatriate Haitians, and calls on the Haitian authorities to make a political commitment to proactive measures, including compulsory purchase;

17. Is increasingly concerned about the situation of the most vulnerable groups of people, in particular women and children, in the wake of the earthquake, which has had a huge impact on more than 800,000 children, exposing them to the risk of violence, sexual abuse, trafficking, exploitation and abandonment, and calls on the EU and in particular the Commission to take firm action with a view to restoring living conditions that afford children protection and safety, so as to support the process of establishing a social protection system in Haiti and encourage education reform; calls for better living conditions and security in the camps;

18. Calls on the EU to work with the Haitian Government with a view to drawing up a legislative framework that protects children’s rights and ensuring that national law reflects the obligations arising out of the numerous international instruments ratified by Haiti concerning the rights of the child, human rights, the abolition of slavery and child protection;

19. Considers it extremely important for the Commission to support the process of identifying and registering children separated from their families and tracing their relatives, and to take special precautions at Haiti’s borders so as to prevent trafficking in children and illegal adoption;

20. Stresses the need for immediate action to build the capacity of the Haitian State in terms of democracy and good governance, which are essential for national reconstruction, and to ensure that Haitian civil society and the Haitian people are involved;

21. Expresses grave concern at the current political crisis following the presidential and parliamentary elections, the results of which have been widely contested and only cautiously endorsed by foreign observer delegations, and which are currently the subject of a recount by experts dispatched by the Organisation of American States (OAS), who – in their report submitted on 13 January 2011 – have recommended that the governing party’s candidate, Jude Célestin, be replaced by Michel Martelly, owing to evidence of fraud;

22. Calls on the EU to do its utmost to support fair and transparent elections and the proper conduct of the second round, postponed to February, so as to prevent Haiti from lapsing into a worse crisis; believes that only a legitimately elected president and parliament can take the necessary decisions, and that reconstruction calls for stability and political determination;

23. Urges the international community and the EU to cooperate closely with the future Haitian authorities and to assist them – throughout the reconstruction process – with the organisation of their institutions and of the state’s powers, with a view to establishing a new equilibrium at all levels and a fully functioning democracy;

24. Stresses the pivotal importance of remittances from the Haitian diaspora in directing capital flows straight into the hands of the Haitian people, who can rapidly put such monies to use to meet pressing needs; asks the Member States and the Haitian Government to facilitate the delivery of remittances and to work towards reducing their cost;

25. Urges the EU and its Member States to keep the recovery and rehabilitation of Haiti high on
their agenda, stresses that now is the time to help Haiti become an economically and politically strong and self-sustaining country, and calls on the international community to use this as an opportunity to tackle the root causes of underlying poverty in Haiti once and for all;

26. Calls on the Commission, in the spirit of the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid, to ensure that a significant effort is made – in conjunction with the government, local authorities and civil society – to incorporate disaster preparation and risk minimisation into the emergency and longer-term development phases;

27. Urges the Commission to put forward proposals as soon as possible for establishing an EU Civil Protection Force based on the EU Civil Protection Mechanism;

28. Notes that Haiti has been the recipient of humanitarian aid for decades, and that the link between emergency aid, reconstruction and development has only become more important in this crisis; emphasises that it is crucial for the UN to be – and remain – in charge of coordinating all civilian and military operations relating to the restoration of security and to humanitarian aid, reconstruction and development;

29. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the Council, the Commission, the Member States, the President and Government of Haiti, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief, the World Bank and the IMF.