

Opening Statement of the

Honorable Maxine Waters, D-35th CA

Financial Services Subcommittee on International Monetary Policy and Trade

Hearing on “Promoting Small and Micro-Enterprise in Haiti”

Wednesday, April 28, 2010

2128 Rayburn House Office Building

2:00 p.m.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for organizing this hearing to discuss how we can effectively promote the development of small and micro-enterprises in Haiti and ensure that small business people in Haiti have opportunities to be involved in Haiti’s reconstruction and development.

I would also like to thank this committee for its support in passing H.R. 4573, the Debt Relief for Earthquake Recovery in Haiti Act. The House agreed to the Senate amendments to H.R. 4573 on April 14th, and the bill was signed by the President on April 26th. I am very pleased that this bill is now public law. Debt relief is essential to Haiti’s future, and the immense debt burden would have severely impeded the country’s recovery efforts. However, we must keep in mind that Haiti will continue to depend upon the support of the international community for both its immediate and long-term development plans.

According to the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), 230,000 people were killed and 1.3 million people were displaced from their homes as a result of the devastating earthquake on January 12, 2010. While I applaud the ongoing efforts of our government, military, and charitable organizations for the assistance they have provided thus far, there is still a desperate need for clean water, food, shelter, and basic sanitation. There is also a need to plan reconstruction and development efforts carefully

so that Haiti will be able to “build back better” and create a better future for its people. These reconstruction and development efforts must create opportunities for small business people in Haiti and allow them to be involved in building their own country.

I recently returned from my second trip to Haiti since the earthquake. While I was there, I organized a meeting between a Contracting Officer from USAID and approximately 150 Haitian small business people and individuals who wanted to start small businesses. The Contracting Officer discussed USAID’s contracting opportunities and explained how Haitian small business people can apply for contracts.

During this meeting, it became clear that there are significant barriers for Haitian small business people who want to bid on USAID contracts for development work in their own country. For example, USAID’s contracting opportunities are described in English – not in Creole or even in French. This effectively excludes Haitians who may be capable of implementing projects on the ground in their own country but who never learned a foreign language. USAID also requires potential contractors to comply with significant technical, bureaucratic and accounting requirements, which may be considered routine business practices by most American businesses, but which are beyond the capacity of many Haitian businesses.

Therefore, Mr. Chairman, I am interested to hear from our panel of witnesses about how we can reach out to Haitian small business people and involve them in the development of their own country. I am especially interested to know if they have suggestions regarding how the development policies of USAID and other international agencies can be improved to provide opportunities for small businesses.

Thank you, and I yield back the balance of my time.