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Study Suggests Alarming Levels of Rape in Haiti Linked to Lack of Basic Resources

Report Documents Continued Insecurity in Camps, Calls for Immediate Action

(New York and Port-au-Prince, January 23, 2012)—High levels of sexual violence against women and girls in Haiti’s tent camps correlate with their inability to find adequate food, clean water, and sanitation, according to a new report released today by the Center for Human Rights and Global Justice (CHR&GJ) and the Global Justice Clinic (GJC) at New York University School of Law. The report—published just weeks after the two-year anniversary of the January 12, 2010 earthquake—reveals that in an alarming 14 percent of camp households surveyed, at least one person had been a victim of rape or sexual assault since the earthquake. Fully 70 percent said they were more fearful of sexual violence since the earthquake.

The Center’s new report, *Yon Je Louvri: Reducing Vulnerability to Sexual Violence in Haiti’s IDP Camps*, examines how shortcomings in the humanitarian response to the 2010 earthquake may have made women and girls more vulnerable to sexual violence, and offers recommendations for immediate steps to reduce risks now and into the future. The title, taken from a Kreyòl proverb about the need for those without safety to sleep with “one eye open,” speaks to the climate of fear in which many displaced women and girls live. The study responds to reports from Haitian women’s rights organizations of an upsurge in cases of rape after the earthquake. It reflects a year and a half of intensive research, which included a survey of 365 households spread across four of Haiti’s IDP camps. Quantitative analysis of the survey data identified significant correlations between limited access to adequate food, water, and sanitation, and increased vulnerability to sexual violence. These findings were confirmed by qualitative data from 18 focus groups and nearly 50 interviews with experts in Haiti.

“Our report proves what Haitian women’s groups have been saying since shortly after the earthquake: that women who have difficulty accessing the basic necessities of life, such as clean water, functioning latrines, and adequate food, are especially vulnerable to sexual violence,” said Margaret Satterthwaite, a Faculty Director at CHR&GJ and the Principal Investigator for the study. “Humanitarian best practices for preventing and responding to sexual violence need to be implemented immediately in Haiti’s remaining IDP camps. Simple measures like installing lighting in camps and locks in latrines must be coupled with long-term strategies for women’s economic empowerment.”

More than half a million people continue to live in tents or makeshift shelters in IDP camps throughout earthquake-affected zones of the country, the majority concentrated in the densely populated capital city of Port-au-Prince. Despite the massive humanitarian response to the disaster, living conditions in the temporary settlements are dire and appear to be deteriorating as IDPs face forced evictions and dwindling humanitarian assistance. Accessing adequate food, water, and sanitation constitutes a daily struggle for camp residents. Tents and other makeshift shelters provide little protection against the elements, let alone against intrusion by assailants. In addition to harsh physical conditions, socioeconomic marginalization and lack of participation of IDPs in governance decisions regarding security and the management of essential resources have heightened the risk that displaced women and girls will experience sexual violence.

“Many women and girls lost the family and community protections they had before the earthquake, making them particularly vulnerable targets for sexual assault,” said Nikki Reisch, a principal author of the report and a law student advocate with GJC who traveled to Haiti with the investigative team. “Victims of violence not only fear reprisal for reporting attacks; they find themselves re-victimized by a system that often silences them and denies them access to justice. The government of Haiti and the international community need to improve security patrols in the camps and ensure free and immediate access to alternative shelter, medical services, and legal assistance for IDPs who have been sexually assaulted.”

The GJC Study suggests that those most vulnerable to sexual violence are likely to:

- Be young and female
- Reside in a household with three or fewer members
- Have limited access to food
- Have limited access to water
- Have limited access to sanitation
- Live in a camp without participatory and responsive governance structures

Yon Je Louvri presents this “Victim Profile” alongside a set of concrete recommendations about how the government of Haiti, the international community, and organizations providing relief and development assistance can reduce the vulnerabilities of those fitting the profile. Specifically, GJC calls on the government of Haiti and its partners to: provide IDPs who have been sexually assaulted in camps with free and immediate access to alternative shelter, medical services, and legal assistance; expand security patrols in and around camps and install lighting and locks in sanitation facilities in camps; prioritize creation of income-generating activities for women; ensure all IDPs have access to free or affordable clean water; and stop forced evictions of IDPs.

The report is available immediately by request, and will be posted online [HERE](#).

In March 2011, CHR/GJC released the preliminary results of its household survey on sexual violence in a briefing paper. To read the briefing paper in English, click [HERE](#). In French, click [HERE](#).

CHR/GJC also recently released a report with several partner organizations, highlighting the related plight of women and girls forced into “survival sex”—the exchange of sex for food, protection, money or shelter—since the earthquake. To read that report, click [HERE](#).

CHR/GJC and its partners have also released reports on [the right to water](#) and [the right to food](#) in Haiti.

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