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September 22, 2004

President George W. Bush
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Bush:

I write to bring to your personal attention to a humanitarian crisis of the highest magnitude in Haiti and to ask that your Administration follow the lead of other nations and provide substantial and immediate assistance to help ease the desperate suffering of the people of Haiti.

Tropical Storm Jeanne caused devastating floods that ravaged this impoverished country this past weekend. As of this morning, the death toll in Haiti exceeded 800, with 1,000 missing. The death toll increases steadily as the water recedes.

Haiti is already the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere, and this latest crisis has made conditions there even worse. This crisis also comes on the heels of ruinous floods four months ago when over 3,000 Haitians were killed, missing, or presumed dead. According to eyewitness accounts, there are bodies scattered in the streets. Some are forced to camp on the roofs of mud-filled homes. Unimaginably, families were sleeping in trees because of the destruction.

Numerous news reports document a desperate need for food, water, medicine, shelter and clothing. The Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Gonaïves said that the possibility exists that several thousand Haitians may die of starvation. "We have nothing," he is quoted by the Associated Press as saying. "About 80 to 90 percent of the houses are under water."

The present interim government of Haiti is totally unequipped and unable to deal with this massive crisis. It has neither the necessary resources nor the organization. Private voluntary groups are also reportedly overwhelmed by the enormity of this crisis, and there are numerous reports of mobs seizing aid

vehicles. Transportation in Haiti, extremely difficult even in the best of times, is particularly crippled now.

However, despite the fact that this crisis struck Haiti over four days ago, The Administration reportedly has released only \$60,000 in relief assistance to CARE. This is wholly inadequate to properly respond to this disaster. It pales compared to the \$1.8 million provided by the European Union and \$1 million and rescue supplies from Venezuela. Other nations are already acting. It is a national embarrassment that the United States of America should respond so slowly and inadequately to so great a crisis in a country so close to our shores. While your Administration assesses, monitors and watches, the suffering in Haiti gets worse.

Haiti does not need expressions of sympathy; it does not need promises. Haiti needs concrete help, and it needs it right now. Your Administration has a responsibility to immediately send significant U.S. emergency assistance to Haiti in the form of food, medicine, fresh water, clothing and emergency shelter and to immediately coordinate, with the international community, the manpower, transportation and distribution of these needed commodities to provide immediate relief to the people of Gonaives and the surrounding countryside.

The time frame for this aid should be hours, not weeks or months. Thank you for your attention and I look forward to your prompt reply to this urgent matter.

Sincerely yours,



KENDRICK B. MEEK
Member of Congress