



The Impact of the Earthquake, and Relief and Recovery Programs on Haitian LGBT People



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A briefing paper¹ produced by the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission² and SEROVIE.³

Introduction

While Haiti has known more than its share of international exploitation, bad governance, political unrest, and natural catastrophes, the impact of the January 12, 2010 earthquake deserves special consideration. The 7.0 magnitude tremor led to the deaths of more than 222,500 people and left more than 1.5 million without shelter.⁴ The United Nations has referred to it as “the largest urban disaster in modern history.”⁵ Within a week of the quake, governments around the world had pledged

\$400 million in aid⁶ and 1,700 relief workers representing more than 40 international relief agencies were at work in Haiti.⁷ The response was unprecedented.

The earthquake affected already marginalized groups of individuals—including the high percentage of Haitians living in poverty, women, girls, people with disabilities, and men and women living with HIV and AIDS—particularly and uniquely, and the Haitian government, local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), UN officials, and international aid workers have granted at least partial recognition to the more severe impact of the earthquake on *certain* marginalized groups. However, the particular vulnerabilities of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) Haitians have been largely ignored. Too many officials and NGO leaders operate on the mistaken beliefs that LGBT people face no greater vulnerabilities than the general population, constitute

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a number insignificant to warrant attention, or are undeserving of the assistance due to other disaster victims and survivors.

The emotional and physical suffering, political and social upheaval, and mass displacement resulting from the earthquake have heightened pre-existing inequalities and prejudices, including those against LGBT people. In this briefing paper, IGLHRC and SEROVie offer a lens through which the earthquake relief and recovery efforts can be viewed in the context of the protection, enjoyment, and promotion of the human rights of LGBT people. By also considering the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami, the 2005 Hurricane Katrina in the U.S. Gulf States, and the 2010 earthquake in Chile, SEROVie and IGLHRC draw comparisons that situate the earthquake in Haiti within the broader context of disasters and emergency responses around the world and their particular impact on LGBT individuals, families, and communities.

The Impact of the Haitian Earthquake on Marginalized Communities

With already limited resources suddenly rendered even more scarce, the earthquake further marginalized sectors of Haitian society already under duress. Many civil society organizations that addressed women's rights issues prior to the disaster were devastated, leaving thousands of women without access to reproductive and sexual health services. *The Komisyon Fanm Viktim pou Viktim* [Commission of Women Victims for Victims/KOFAVIV], for example, lost no fewer than 332 of the women with whom they worked and its offices were destroyed,⁸ forcing the organization to discontinue critical health and psychosocial support programs that served survivors of rape. Access to HIV and AIDS-related services were also devastated. In conversations with UNAIDS Senior Regional Monitoring and Evaluation Adviser Bilali Camara, IGLHRC and SEROVie learned that 57% of the organizations providing HIV/AIDS services in Haiti were located in the areas most affected by the earthquake.⁹

Through the media, in public statements, and at roundtable meetings, the Haitian government, UN agencies, international donors, and local human rights movements promised to address the specific needs of vulnerable communities after the earthquake. Haitian women's rights organizations have done their best to respond to the overwhelming demands of women affected by the earthquake. KOFAVIV, *Fanm Viktim Leve Kanpe* (Women Victims Stand Up/FAVILEK), and other Haitian women's rights groups have worked tirelessly to document rape and provide support to survivors. Less than a month after the earthquake, the Myriam Merlet Feminist International Solidarity Camp¹⁰ was opened on the border of the Dominican Republic and Haiti, an impressive example of regional feminist collaboration.¹¹ The World Health Organization drafted a strategy for long-term services for people with disabilities, and Handicap International sent a staff of 480 to Haiti, the largest deployment in the organization's history.

But in too many instances, commitments to even recognize marginalized groups turned out to be mainly rhetorical or were plagued by major challenges. In July 2010, six months after the earthquake, international women's rights organization MADRE reported that there was "a demonstrated lack of governmental response to sexual violence occurring in the camps." It argued that the government "lacks both the political

"In a trauma situation, all of the reflexes are bad for minorities, for women, for LGBT."

-Lorraine Mangones,
Fondation Connaissance
et Liberté/Open Society
Institute Haiti (FOKAL)

will and the capacity to respond.”¹² A month after the earthquake, UNAIDS was still working with Haiti’s 15,000 registered AIDS clinics to restore services to the HIV seroprevalent population, approximately 60% of which had not returned to clinics to access treatment.¹³ Meanwhile, sexual violence against women and girls—already at unacceptably high levels prior to the earthquake—steadily increased in the overcrowded and insecure environment that typify the majority of camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs).¹⁴ By October 2010, nine months after the earthquake, KOFIVIV and FAVILEK, two of Haiti’s most established women’s rights groups, complained that they hadn’t received any funds from UN agencies that had been pledged to “support the Haitian...civil society in the fight against gender-based violence.”¹⁵

But while efforts to respond to the needs of marginalized groups were insufficient, they nonetheless represented an acknowledgement that these groups warranted targeted disaster response programs. For members of the LGBT community, it was different: there would be little help coming from outside of the country, few local organizations prepared to address their specific needs, and serious challenges to their access to emergency services.

The Particular Effects of the Earthquake on the LGBT Community

Prior to the earthquake, the lives of many LGBT people in Haiti were characterized by secrecy, isolation, discrimination, and violence. These conditions were either mitigated or reinforced by other social characteristics such as class, age, gender, gender expression, education, and levels of family support. Yet regardless of circumstance, many LGBT people recount personal narratives of denial of access to housing, health

care, education, or employment, as well as violence based on sexual orientation or gender identity. Their stories make clear that discrimination, violence, and stigma based on real and/or perceived non-adherence to heteronormative sexual orientation and gender identity was pervasive throughout Haitian society before the earthquake.

When the earthquake hit Port-au-Prince on a late Tuesday afternoon, the staff of SEROVie were conducting an HIV prevention workshop.¹⁶ Within seconds, only one room remained of the SEROVie office, which consisted, only seconds before, of multiple meeting rooms, a cybercafe and a library. When asked to identify the greatest impact of the earthquake on their lives, the majority of LGBT people interviewed for this paper indicated that it decimated the already limited physical spaces, social networks and support services available to them. According to one Port-au-Prince lesbian, “Loneliness, invisibility, and social isolation are persistent problems for us.”¹⁷ SEROVie’s community center was essential for men who have sex with men (MSM), transgender women and a small number of bisexual and lesbian women who made use of their services. According to Reginald DuPont, SEROVie Program Manager, “It was a place

where LGBT people can come and relax, build community and find acceptance. Since the devastation of the earthquake on our offices, SEROVie is not what it used to be.”¹⁸

“The sound is unforgettable. I can’t even describe the horror as the ceiling and the walls of the conference room started to fall and the chaos started. Fourteen young men were lost forever in the earthquake. The group leader and Stacy were the only survivors.”

-Steve Laguerre,
SEROVie Executive Director

In the days and weeks following the earthquake, gay men and transgender individuals flocked to the SEROVie community center from all parts of the city, as the organization provided counseling as well as distributing limited stocks of rice, cornmeal and cooking oil. During this period, SEROVie was forced to discontinue all regular services as it struggled to respond to the immediate needs of its members, as many LGBT people suddenly found themselves homeless, destitute, and grieving.

The Rights to Housing and Security of Persons¹⁹

Despite (or perhaps as a result of) the devastating impact of homophobic harassment and violence in their daily lives, LGBT people find ways of coping and creating safety in their lives. They navigate safe routes for travel between home, school, market, and places of employment. They rely on the vigilance of family, friends, and sympathetic neighbors to be aware of their comings and goings. They derive a sense of security from the ability to close a window or lock a door as both physical and a psychological barriers against intrusion and violence. But, the earthquake disrupted regular patterns of movement, scattered friends, families and neighbors, and damaged or destroyed the doors, windows and walls that had previously provided some measure of safety. LGBT Haitians interviewed by IGLHRC and SEROVie expressed the view that violence related to sexual orientation and gender expression has significantly increased since the earthquake, particularly within the IDP camps.

By April 2010, according to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), there were more than 1 million displaced Haitians living in more than 1,000 spontaneous settlements²⁰ and by October, only 28,000 of the 1.5 million Haitians displaced by the earthquake were in new homes.²¹ In April 2010, SEROVie was working with more than 500 MSM and 30 lesbian or bisexual women living in IDP camps in and around Port-au-Prince and there were likely many more who had not identified themselves to the SEROVie outreach workers who regularly visit the camps.²²

Overcrowding, flimsy structures, inadequate lighting, public bathing facilities, and general insecurity in IDP camps have increased the risk of gender-based violence for all women and people viewed as gender non-conforming, including LGBT people. SEROVie has documented the rape of lesbians, gay men and transgender women in or near camps. In August, 2010 for example, Sandy, a 24-year-old lesbian was brutally raped by eight men at the Champs de Mars camp,²³ Additionally, SEROVie documented more subtle forms of sexual exploitation in which LGBT people were coerced into engaging in sexual relations with straight-identified men for food or money. A group of lesbian and bisexually-identified women interviewed by SEROVie and IGLHRC reported that sexual violence and corrective rape were “definitely a problem” in the IDP camps.²⁴

Gay and bisexual men reported that they had taken on a more masculine demeanor since the earthquake, altering their voice, posture, and gait—“*mettre des roches sur nos epaules*”²⁵ (“putting rocks on our shoulders”)—in order to avoid harassment both inside and outside of the camps and to reduce the chances of being denied access to emergency

The earthquake disrupted regular patterns of movement, scattered friends, families and neighbors, and damaged or destroyed the doors, windows and walls that had previously provided some measure of safety.

housing, healthcare, and/or enrollment in food-for-work programs. Lengemy, a young MSM-identified Haitian, was ejected from an emergency food distribution line at Sylvio Cator Stadium because he was visibly effeminate. “They said, ‘What’s up chichi man?’ and then they started hitting me so I had to leave.”²⁶

In the post-earthquake context, many LGBT people expressed a lack of confidence in the capacity²⁷ and the willingness of the police to assure protection and adherence to the rule of law when it came to protecting LGBT people. In March 2010, Jean M. was threatened and physically attacked for supposedly flirting with a man sitting across from him on a *taptap* (local bus). When he found a nearby policeman, rather than explaining that he was being harassed as a result of his sexuality, he told the policeman that he had been a victim of theft because, he said, “I knew that [the police] would only help me if I told them that I had been robbed. If the police knew I was gay, they would have attacked me instead of the man who beat me.”²⁸

Similarly, Evariste told interviewers that: “My brother and I were having an argument. I went to the police looking for help. When my brother told them that I was *masisi* (gay), they slapped me and laughed. They beat me even worse than he did.”²⁹

In addition to the stigma that women face generally when reporting rapes and sexual violence to authorities, lesbian, bisexual women or other women who transgress gender norms face additional discrimination, particularly when the crime may have been perpetrated in response to their perceived sexual orientation or gender expression. Male victims of sexual violence—gay or otherwise—are often stigmatized by police for ‘allowing’ themselves to be raped. This revictimization as a result of what may be perceived as inappropriate gender expression by police results in gross underreporting of hate crimes by LGBT people and reduces the likelihood that LGBT individuals will seek legal, medical or psychosocial assistance after facing sexual victimization.

The Right to Adequate Food³⁰

Emergency food rations provided by the World Food Program, USAID and other international donors and distributed mainly by private voluntary organizations (PVOs), are made available first and sometimes exclusively to women as ‘female heads of households.’ Based on established emergency operational policy, this standard operating procedure is based on experiences showing that women are more likely than men to equitably distribute these rations to other family members, particularly the most vulnerable such as children, the elderly, the sick, and nursing women. This policy is implemented in light of the greater vulnerability of women to food insecurity, the role that women in Haitian society have traditionally played as caregivers for those who are even more vulnerable, and the reality that most adult male Haitians are married. However, this policy has had the unintended side-effect of excluding many gay men and transgender people in need. Many Haitian LGBT have been rejected by their families or are living in families that do not include an adult female. One MSM was so desperate that he attempted to collect food aid at the Champs de Mars IDP camp by dressing as a woman, however, he was discovered by other men standing near the line and beaten until he left.³¹

The LGBT women interviewed also reported a reluctance to obtain food aid and other relief supplies through queuing at distribution lines. They explained that while women were allowed to stand in the aid lines, aid distribution was often chaotic and dangerous. Most of the other women who collected emergency aid came with husbands or male relatives who could provide some protection if violence broke out and who could help

carry home the relief supplies. Many of the lesbian and bisexual women interviewed said that, due to family rejection, they lacked male relatives or friends with whom they could collect aid. They also emphasized that as lesbians whose orientation and/or gender expression might be perceptible, they felt unsafe in crowded, volatile environments.

Some organizations, such as the American Red Cross (ARC), attempted to be more inclusive in their aid distribution system. When registering families and distributing ration cards to residents of IDP camps, ARC gave cards to the female head of each household but also to male heads of household if no females were present. However, these men still needed a woman in order to actually benefit from distribution, because the Red Cross policy only allowed women to stand in line and present the ration cards for aid. These gender restrictive policies effectively excluded all-male households, such as one in the Delmas IDP camp in Port-au-Prince that IGLHRC and SEROVie interviewed. The family, made up of two MSM and an informally adopted teenager who had lost his mother in the earthquake, was unable to receive food assistance from relief organizations operating in the camp and was living a precarious and stressful existence.³²

On February 10, 2010 SEROVie sent a letter to a representative of the American Red Cross asking for assistance—food aid, hygiene kits, and provisionary shelters—for more than 100 MSM that the organization had identified as particularly vulnerable. The letter referenced the LGBT Red Cross Fund (which would ultimately raise more than \$250,000 mainly from U.S. LGBT businesses and individuals for Red Cross aid to Haiti). The letter correctly did not suggest that any of the funds were raised with the intention of supporting the Haitian LGBT community, but cited it as a demonstration of goodwill between the U.S. LGBT community and the Red Cross Federation.

As a matter of protocol, the American Red Cross replied to SEROVie by suggesting they contact the Haitian Red Cross. As Chloe Gans-Rugebregt, an American Red Cross representative in Haiti explained, “[t]he American Red Cross does not provide targeted aid to identified minority groups as a matter of policy, nor would it take unprecedented action without the guidance or authorization of the Haitian Red Cross, which supervises all of the international Red Cross organizations that are operating in the country.” Fearing a homophobic response from the Haitian Red Cross, SEROVie perceived the response as a rejection of their request. As SEROVie’s Dupont explained, “We knew that it was unlikely that the Haitian Red Cross that they would help us... that they would find any excuse to refuse us because they knew that the aid would be going to *massisi*.”³³

The Right to Freedom from Arbitrary Arrest and Detention³⁴

By the time Haiti gained its independence in 1804, consensual same-sex acts had been decriminalized for more than a dozen years in France. As a result, Haiti did not inherit an anti-homosexuality law and one has never been introduced. However, in September 2010, eighteen men were arrested at a party and held in police custody for three days under charges of disrupting public order.³⁵ While the arrests seem to have been related to conflict over a noisy party, the large number of men taken into custody and the inability of the police to settle the conflict without resorting to arrests raises concerns about the treatment of LGBT people in Haiti.

On September 13, 2010, forty women were arrested in the Champs de Mars IDP Camp.³⁶ Haitian television station *Télé Eclair* first reported that they had been arrested for “practicing ‘woman on woman’ activities in tents.”³⁷ But in a later TV interview, Port-au-Prince Police Commissioner Michel-Ange Gedeon, stated that the women would be

charged with immorality and indecency—perhaps because there is no law against same-sex relationships in the Haitian Penal Code—and intimated that the women were sex workers. While the women were released after two days of detention in overcrowded prison cells, Mr. Gedeon said that the “operation initiated in the Champs de Mars camp would be expanded to other areas.”³⁸ While the actual motivations of the arrest of these women remains unclear, the conflation of lesbianism with sex work, as well as the exposure of these women to the media and the public as transgressors of gender norms and therefore worthy of punishment creates a frightening environment for all women.

The Blame Game

There is a striking parallel between the the finger-pointing of international medical experts, epidemiologists, and journalists charting the origin and path of HIV in the mid-to-late 1980s and the assignation of blame for the 2010 Haitian earthquake. Both

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-IGLHRC/SEROvie Focus Group

provoked waves of condemnation against Haitian people and culture and both demonized gay and bisexual men. In the 1980s, Haitians were blamed for providing a ‘bridge’ for HIV to enter the U.S., and now ironically, local and foreign religious zealots are blaming both Haitian culture and its gay community for calling down the wrath of God in the form of the 2010 earthquake.

When the January 2010 earthquake hit Port-au-Prince, Paul Emil Ernst, Director of the AIDS service organization *Action Civique Contre le VIH* (ACCV), and other organization volunteers were planning a birthday party for Toni, a fellow staff member at the ACCV office on Castro Street in Port-au-Prince. As the walls of the office caved in around them, Ernst witnessed the horrific death of some of his closest friends. Moments later, as he struggled to extricate himself from the rubble with the help of office security personnel, he heard cheers coming from neighbors gathering outside: “*Meci Jesus, prezidan an pedo ki mouri.*” (“Thank you Jesus, the president of the pedophiles is dead.”) and “*Mo an masisi!*” (“Death to the *masisi!*”). Despite serious injuries,

Ernst and the other survivors quickly fled, fearing for their lives. They were forced to leave behind the bodies of three friends who died in the collapse—Toni, Jerri, and Doudou. For several days, their bodies remained unclaimed; their families so utterly rejected them for being openly gay.

In the weeks following the earthquake, many MSM heard sermons on the radio and in churches, as well as talk in the streets that blamed the *masisi* and other “sinners” for incurring the wrath of God and causing the earthquake.³⁹ One gay man named Micke reported to IGLHRC and SEROvie that an MSM friend was beaten by an angry crowd whose members verbally abused him and accused him of being responsible for the earthquake. There have also been verbal and physical attacks against Vodou practitioners following the earthquake, perpetrated by those who felt that, like homosexuals, *Vodouists* were immoral and bore some responsibility for the country’s catastrophe. It is common knowledge that a significant number of Vodou are *masisi*, and many LGBT believe that it was easier to be open about one’s sexuality and gender expression within Vodou culture.

Worldwide, the irrational blaming of LGBT people and other marginalized members of society for “natural” disasters is not uncommon. In 2005, U.S. televangelist Pat Robertson and San Antonio megachurch pastor John Hagee linked Hurricane Katrina to immorality and debauchery—including homosexuality—taking place in the city of New Orleans.⁴⁰ In 2010, the Association of the Russian Orthodox Experts blamed LGBT activists for the April 14 eruption of the Eyjafjallajökull Volcano in Iceland,⁴¹ while in Iran, Tehran’s Friday prayer Imam cited adultery and “the laxities of some women” as the cause of earthquakes everywhere.⁴² This accusatory theology was also applied to Haiti, with Robertson positing that the January earthquake was the result of a pact with the devil that Haitians purportedly made to guarantee their liberation from French rule.⁴³

These assignments of sin and immorality as root causes of disaster seem to serve as a means of making sense of the horrible tragedies that humanity experiences. While the identification of a blameworthy party (or parties) may be cathartic for some, it is rarely mere rhetoric: it places real people at risk, as innocent individuals are held accountable for widespread human suffering that they too are experiencing. With increased activity in the Caribbean by U.S.-based religious homophobes like Philip Lee of His Way Out Ministries of Bakersfield, California, and planeloads of missionary relief workers still arriving in Haiti in what one Haitian lesbian describes as “a religious gold rush,” fears of increased exportation of homophobia from the United States to Haiti are very real indeed.⁴⁴

Same Problems, Different Disaster

Catastrophes of epic proportions have always been part of the human experience, and are likely to become more pronounced given the predicted effects of global warming. According to the Center for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters, more than 544 million people were affected by disasters between 2007 and 2009,⁴⁵ while figures for the first half of 2010 are upwards of 100 million.⁴⁶ But time and time again, experience shows that those already on the margins, or those living in the intersections of prejudice and discrimination, fare worse and recover more slowly—LGBT people included.

In 2004, a 9.0 earthquake in the Indian Ocean generated one of the most devastating tsunamis in history. The U.S. Geological Survey estimated that the earthquake released the same amount of energy as 23,000 Hiroshima-type atomic bombs and in the first day alone, millions of individuals in eleven countries were made homeless.⁴⁷ In the disaster that followed the tsunami, India’s Aravanis community were disproportionately affected. The Aravanis represent a gender category that “cannot be explained using a two-gender framework; they “may be born inter-sex or apparently male, dress in feminine clothes and generally see themselves as neither women nor men.”⁴⁸

Oxfam found that because the Aravani population did not conform to the standard gender binary, they were invisibilized in the country’s relief, rehabilitation, and reconstruction agenda. There were no official records of deaths and losses incurred by the Aravani or reports on the subsequent trauma and neglect they experienced. After the tsunami, most Aravanis could not obtain ration cards and those Aravanis who were married to men were not compensated with the standard ex-gratia available to Indian women whose husbands had died in the disaster.⁴⁹ Furthermore, many Aravani were unable to access emergency housing, which was often gender segregated.

Like the Indian Ocean tsunami, the February 2010 earthquake in Chile affected LGBT people in significant and specific ways. According to Andres Rivera Duarte, a transgender man and executive director of the *Organizacion de Transexuales por*

la Dignidad de la Diversidad (OTD) based in Rancagua City, Chile, the Chilean government systematically restricted disaster relief to middle and upper-class neighborhoods. Working class neighborhoods, where many LGBT people live due to economic disparities, were neglected. Red Light Districts in particular, where many transgender women live and work, were not targeted for disaster assistance. Additionally, the destruction of factories and businesses in the area left thousands of people unemployed, which in turn left many transgender sex workers unemployed. The *Centro Cultural Lésbico Frida Kahlo* (Frida Kahlo Lesbian Cultural Center) was completely destroyed, and the headquarters of the Corporation for HIV/AIDS Prevention (*Acción Gay*) in Valparaíso suffered severe damage. Because there were limited official efforts to reach out to poor and marginalized LGBT populations after the crisis, OTD and other LGBT organizations provided essential food, clothing, and shelter.

The impact of tropical storm Katrina on the U.S. Gulf States in August 2005 provides yet another set of examples of how LGBT people face harsh and dangerous discrimination during natural disasters. The assumptions of heteronormativity of relief victims by aid organizations and homophobic and transphobic attitudes in the Gulf States, severely limited the resources and safety nets available for the LGBT community. Lesbian, bisexual, and transgender women were particularly affected by these realities.⁵⁰ A 2008 report published by Tulane University noted that “When speaking of the challenges ‘women’ face in post-Katrina New Orleans, there are two problematic underlying assumptions: that the category of woman is stable and coherent and that women are heterosexual.”⁵¹ Temporary shelter was a particular problem for transgender individuals and even some gay men and lesbians. Relief workers made determinations that excluded some transwomen from women’s shelters and there were no trans-specific facilities.⁵² The report also noted the particular challenges encountered by transgender women, “as they were forced to depend on a system that views gender as binary and failed to acknowledge the specific gender needs of transmen and women.”⁵³

Sharli’e Dominique, a transgender woman, was arrested for taking a shower in the women’s bathroom at Texas A&M University, which was operating as a shelter for refugees of the hurricane. Despite having received permission from a shelter volunteer to use the women’s bathroom after she had expressed her fear and unease at using the men’s bathroom, Dominique was still arrested on charges of criminal trespassing.⁵⁴ These charges were eventually dropped, but Dominique first spent five days in jail, during which officials told her she could expect to be in prison for up to a year because courts were “backed up.”⁵⁵ Sharli’e experience was not unique. Many transgender people were already suffering from housing insecurity and in the wake of Katrina many found themselves unable to seek refuge in single-sex shelters for fear of violence and discrimination.⁵⁶

Recommendations: Toward a More Inclusive Perspective on Disasters, Relief, and Recovery

Disasters are, by definition, chaotic. The relief and recovery efforts set up to respond to and mitigate them, however, must be based on the best practices and guidelines for human rights adherence developed over years of careful scrutiny and review. The lack of response to the specific impact of disasters on LGBT communities and individuals is itself an emergency that has doubtless resulted in unnecessary suffering and an untold number of deaths. In the past three years alone, disasters in South Asia, Chile, the U.S. Gulf States, and Pakistan have highlighted the failure of states and civil society to attend

to the needs of LGBT people, as well as the dire consequences of that neglect. Haste and expedience can never be an excuse for failing to recognize the particular needs and vulnerabilities of a particular set of individuals based on human characteristics such as sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression.

Those community institutions that are the strongest—both in terms of physical infrastructure and organizational capacity—are most capable of providing emergency support. In its *Policy Recommendations to Address Critical Security Concerns and Needs of Women Human Rights Defenders in Haiti in the Aftermath of the 12 January 2010 Earthquake*, the Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition recommended that securing a safe space for LGBT people to meet and organize be viewed as a key security consideration given the prevalence of gender-based violence in situations of crisis.⁵⁷ Rebuilding SEROVie and the few other organizations that provide service to LGBT communities—such as the Fondation Esther Boucicault in St. Marc and AACCV in Port-au-Prince—must be a priority.

The social upheaval and rethinking of values and norms that happen after a disaster can present an opportunity for establishing accountability, respect, and equality where there was none before. Recovery and reconstruction efforts can present an opportunity to address human rights violations against LGBT people and other marginalized groups. For example, NGOs that oversee housing restitution and reconstruction can ensure that LGBT people are included in the allocation of new housing units. As society is rebuilt and reconfigured, there is a unique opportunity to include LGBT people more fully and equitably. Government, civil society, and religious institutions can use the normlessness that may exist to promote messages of inclusion and diversity.

UN Agencies and PVOs must be deliberately and unabashedly inclusive of LGBT people in planning and implementing disaster response programming. Emergency response mechanisms have failed to include LGBT communities and their leaders much in the same way that they have been slow to create real space for other Haitian civil-society leaders. Haiti's Gender-Based Violence Sub-Cluster—which is overseen by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and is coordinated by the United Nation's Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)—is perhaps the most potent example of a missed opportunity to engage Haiti's LGBT leadership in relevant relief and recovery efforts.

The pain and suffering experienced by such a broad cross-section of Haitian society encourages a narrative of equal suffering in which the vulnerabilities of certain groups, particularly an unpopular minority such as LGBT people, are easily underestimated, overlooked, and discounted. While earthquakes, torrential rains, tsunamis, and other phenomenon will continue to occur, there is nothing natural about the ways in which certain social groups are denied access to adequate housing, education, employment, security, and other basic human rights that could mitigate the impact of disaster. While earthquakes may occur naturally, homophobic discrimination does not. The time to end the impact of transphobia and homophobia in emergency preparedness and response is now.

To the Government of Haiti and Other Countries that Find Themselves in Disaster Situations:

- Base relief and reconstruction efforts (in Haiti) on the respect and promotion of all human rights, regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity.
- Actively support HIV/AIDS treatment and prevention work for LGBT people.
- Ensure that LGBT organizations are consulted when planning responses to future disasters and during the course of responding to a disaster.
- Work with police, military, and security forces to ensure that LGBT people are not stigmatized in the course of responding to a disaster.

To Donor and Partner Governments and International Agencies:

- Issue relief and emergency guidelines that:
 - Ensure that LGBT organizations are at the table when planning responses to future disasters and during the course of responding to a disaster.
 - Ensure an inclusive approach to gender-based violence that recognizes that lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and transgender individuals are often targeted for sexual violence and have specific counseling and medical needs.

To Relief Organizations Distributing Aid and Managing Camps for Displaced Persons:

- Accommodate single-sex families in food and other aid distribution policies.
- Ensure that relief and development assistance does not result in or contribute to human rights violations and that there are effective mechanisms for the meaningful participation of all affected communities, including the most marginalized, in the relief and development assistance efforts.
- Include LGBT organizers and community leaders and in courses and training on disaster management to enable them to function effectively in crisis situations.
- Create a safe space for LGBT people to meet and organize as a key security consideration given the prevalence of gender-based violence in situations of crisis.

To Foundations, Civil Society and Human Rights Groups Working in Haiti and Future Disaster Situations:

- Base reconstruction efforts in Haiti on the respect and promotion of all human rights, regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity.
- Help to build strong LGBT movements and organizations before disaster occurs, so that they are capable of providing emergency support to their members.

(Endnotes)

- 1 The principal authors of this briefing paper are Steeve Laguerre, Cary Alan Johnson, Samara Fox, Reginald Dupont and Marcelo Ferreyra. The authors traveled around Haiti from April 9 - 14, 2010 to evaluate the impact of the earthquake. During that time, they interviewed about 75 LGBT people, MSM and WSW, along with a broad range of representatives of local and international relief organizations, diplomatic missions, and the United Nations. Subsequent interviews were carried out by phone and email and one interview was conducted with a Haitian refugee in the Dominican Republic. Thanks to Sam Cook, Erin Costello, Marcelo Ferreyra, Rosa Posa, Sara Perle, and Jessica Stern for additional research and for editing. Thanks also to Kathy Mills for typesetting and Mary-Alice Farina for the translation into French. Special thanks to Brian Concannon and Blaine Bookey at the Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti for reviewing the report.
- 2 The International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC) is a leading international organization dedicated to human rights advocacy on behalf of people who experience discrimination or abuse on the basis of their actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity or expression.
- 3 SEROVie is a Haitian Community organization that seeks to improve the quality of life and uphold the dignity of men and sexual minorities as well as their families. Since 2001, SEROVie has educated the Haitian community on HIV and AIDS, enabling them to make informed decisions; maintained a resource center for information and documentation on HIV and AIDS available to local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as well as to the MSM population; and focused on the development of a Human rights program through the establishment of partnerships with local organizations working on Human rights issues.
- 4 UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti, 22 April 2010, S/2010/200, *available at*: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4be90cae26.html>.
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 - 22 SEROVie outreach workers have spent hundreds of hours in the camps distributing condoms, and providing counseling for displaced Haitians regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.
 - 23 IGLHRC/SEROVie Interview, Port-au-Prince, Haiti, April 2010.
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 - 27 Ibid.
 - 28 The earthquake significantly reduced the already challenged capacity of the Haitian police and security forces. In addition to a loss of officers and personnel, forty police stations were either destroyed or severely damaged, including two units that specifically dealt with cases of gender-based violence. Almost four months later Haitian security forces remained overwhelmingly crippled by these losses, as some 2,200 officers attempted to serve a population of 9 million—a breakdown of about one police officer for every 4,000 Haitians. (“Our Bodies Are Still Trembling—Haitian Women’s Fight Against Rape.” MADRE. July 2010, *available at*: http://www.madre.org/images/uploads/misc/1283377138_2010.07.26%20-%20HAITI%20GBV%20REPORT%20FINAL.pdf.)
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 - 31 IGLHRC/SEROVie Focus Group, SEROVie offices, Port-au-Prince, Haiti, April 13, 2010.
 - 32 IGLHRC/SEROVie interview with C.D. and family, Champs de Mars IDP Camp, Port-au-Prince, Haiti, April 12, 2010.
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