



Policy Brief

Haiti and Natural Disasters at the G8 and G20

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Two days after an earthquake devastated Haiti on January 12, 2010, the G20 pledged to “send immediate economic and in kind assistance.” That month, Canadian prime minister Stephen Harper acknowledged the G8’s “obligation to assist those who are most vulnerable to hardship.” In February, the G7 finance ministers forgave all of Haiti’s bilateral debt. In March, Harper encouraged the G8 to help with Haiti’s long-term reconstruction. The G8 foreign ministers pledged to direct attention to Haiti’s “longer-term infrastructure, governance and security needs.” At their April meetings, the G20 finance ministers welcomed the establishment of the Haiti Reconstruction Fund and the G8 development ministers agreed to “improve the coordination and development assistance.”

Since the initial focus on natural disasters at the 1989 Paris Summit, the G8 has increasingly included natural disasters on its agenda. However, performance has been limited, and attention focused mostly on response and assistance. The G8 has a strong record of providing support to countries affected by natural disasters. At the 2003 Evian Summit, the G8 provided emergency humanitarian aid after the earthquake in Algeria. At the 2005 Gleneagles Summit, the G8 again committed to providing emergency assistance following the Indian Ocean tsunami.

In preparation for the 2010 Muskoka and Toronto summits, the G8 and G20 have both emphasized the need for an immediate and coordinated disaster response. In response to the Haiti earthquake, Harper declared that “as leaders of the most developed economies of the world, we have an obligation to assist those who are most vulnerable to hardship. Canada hopes members of the G8 will rally together on this.” The G20 expressed a similar sentiment in a statement in January, reaffirming the “readiness and commitment to send immediate economic and in kind assistance to attend to the basic human needs of the Haitian population.”

In March, Jacques Diouf, director-general of the Food and Agriculture Organization, called on the G8 to include Haiti as a recipient of its US\$20 billion pledge toward food programs and sustainable agricultural development. The G8 and G20 will likely comply, as Haiti will be under discussion along with natural disasters at both the Muskoka and Toronto summits. Leaders will follow up on the US\$15 billion (US\$5 billion for short-term assistance and US\$10 billion for long-term reconstruction) pledged at the UN international donors conference for Haiti in March. In addition to highlighting continued support for emergency humanitarian aid programs, the G8 and G20 will discuss longer-term development initiatives. G8 leaders will likely support Haiti’s agricultural development by including it as a recipient of its 2009 pledge. The G20 will work to complete the cancellation of Haiti’s debts to international financial institutions.

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