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DU PEUPLE AMERICAIN



Protecting Human Rights in Haiti Program

“Yon Ayiti San Restavèk”

A Public Education Campaign on the Prevention of Human Rights Violations on Restavèk Children

August 1 – December 31, 2009

In between these two perspectives of social solidarity and child slavery at opposite ends of the public opinion spectrum stand a wide variety of meanings given to the word *restavèk* although in most cases, it is usually part of the majority view that *restavèk* children are inferior to the children of the house, that they are to be treated differently and it is permitted therefore to deprive them of school and abuse them verbally, physically and for most girl *restavèks*, sexually, despite the child protection legal framework and system that exist in Haiti to protect children from abuse. Culturally and socially, the word *restavèk* is often used as an insult charged with many negative stereotypes, i.e. submissive, unable to affirm him or herself, who cannot express his or her opinion and personality, etc. a profound meaning emerging from the everyday observation of the *restavèk* reality and its various forms of exploitation of the children.

The consequences of abuse are quite severe for the children and often result in what health professionals call “developmental attrition” that “results from the failure to reach normal developmental landmarks year after year, so that the cumulative defect becomes ever larger. It is the result of inadequate intake of nourishment vital for the body and the mind: proteins, calories, and micronutrients, perceptual and cognitive stimuli, and social interactions. Attrition manifests itself in three ways: physically, as height and weight well below norms for age; in school settings, as learning failure and retarded mental development; and behaviorally, as psychiatric disorder and social deviance”ⁱⁱⁱ. The risk of physical and psychological trauma is great. “Many reportedly suffer symptoms of severe depression, withdrawal, and inferior status identity. In addition, as they have time for nothing but sleep and work, their intellectual and social development is limited, and creativity is stifled. Lacking in education and social and intellectual skills, the children are doomed to a life of toil and poverty”^{iv}. In the case of sexual abuse to girls, the trauma is compounded by the high risk of sexually transmitted infections including HIV/AIDS and unwanted pregnancies^v.

A Global Concern

In the international context, the *restavèk* system is viewed as the number one trafficking in persons issue in Haiti. The US State Department’s Trafficking in Persons 2009 Report states: “the majority of trafficking cases are found among the estimated 90,000 to 300,000 *restavèks* in Haiti, and the 3,000 additional *restavèks* who are trafficked to the Dominican Republic”^{vi}. “...These *restavèks*, 65 percent of whom are girls between the ages of six and 14, work excessive hours, receive no schooling or payment and are often physically and sexually abused”. “Dismissed and runaway *restavèks* make up a significant proportion of the large population of street children, who frequently are forced to work in prostitution or street crime by violent criminal gangs”.

Following a recent visit to Haiti from June 2 to June 10, Ms. Gulnara Shahinian, the UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery expressed her deep concern over the exploitation of children victims of the *restavèk* system in Haiti. For the Special Rapporteur and the many agencies of the United Nations, the *restavèk* system is a modern form of slavery. This view is shared by the Jean Robert Cadet Foundation, several international NGOs such as Free the Slaves and the Anti-Slavery International, and a recent report by Dr. Sanjay Gupta on CNN denouncing Haiti as a modern-day slave state.

The Restavèk System is a Grievous Human Rights Violation

Whether or not the *restavèk* system is a form of slavery is a long and complicated debate that will certainly take place during the upcoming Conference on Restavèk Children. What is absolutely clear and agreed upon by all is that the *restavèk* system is a human right violation.

« This practice » said Ms. Gulnara Shahinian during her June visit « is a severe violation of the most fundamental rights of the child . . . ». As stated by Article 32 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

During its First Year, the PHR Program assisted: a total of 235 victims of human rights violations (Male: 48; Female: 187) and a total of 545 victims of trafficking (Male: 432, Female: 113) of trafficking. While the majority of the trafficking victims were restavèk children, the majority of victims of human rights violations were underage girl victims of sexual violence.

1.3 A Communication Initiative

The PHR Program considers the exploitation of restavèk children as one of the most urgent trafficking in persons issues in Haiti. It encompasses both the trafficking dimension and the violence against children dimension. As such, these are grievous human rights violations committed against a population of vulnerable children, most of whom are girls.

The public education campaign developed by the PHR Program proposes to address these issues and work toward the prevention of human rights violations against restavèk children. With this communication initiative, the PHR Program sets forth the following goals:

- (1) Inform the general public about the restavèk system;
- (2) Create a public debate on the restavèk system;
- (3) Allow the general public to understand the abusive nature of the restavèk system;
- (4) Build a consensus on ways to prevent human rights violations on restavèk children.
- (5) Change the general public's attitude from accepting the restavèk system to eliminating it.

Some very tangible outcomes are sought through this communications effort:

- (1) Civil society, the churches, the private sector and the GOH come together and participate in the upcoming Conference on Restavèk Children;
- (2) A public debate takes place and a consensus emerges that the restavèk children must be protected;
- (3) The Haitian Parliament is sensitized over the importance of the anti-trafficking legislation in Parliament;
- (4) Child Protection agencies of the GOH work hand in hand with NGOs, churches, the private sector to better monitor and prevent abuses of restavèk children;
- (5) The long-term expected outcome is societal consensus to progressively eliminate the restavèk system.

This longer-term result of the campaign is best explained by Bernard Dagenais¹, Professor of Communication at Laval University : « in a society, the great changes in behavior take from ten to fifteen years before they become reality and are influenced by many factors ». This communication initiative is one of the many steps striving to bring about a change of attitude and behavior in the general public toward the respect and protection of children's rights, including those of restavèk children.

¹ Bernard DAGENAIS, *Le plan de Communication: l'art de séduire ou de convaincre les autres*, 1998, p.253 « dans une société, les grands changements de comportement prennent de dix à quinze ans avant de devenir réalité et sont influencés par multiples facteurs »

The issue of restavèk children is urgent because the maltreatment of children in the country is jeopardizing its future and the future of upcoming generations in what some leaders in Haiti see as the next generation of gang leaders and gang members. Regionally and internationally, the restavèk issue is in the spotlight with recent reports on CNN and defining how Haiti as a country is perhaps unfairly perceived as a modern slave state.

The messages we will use will be clear, consistent, credible, culturally relevant, targeted, sensitive and respectful of all target audiences.

The face the PHR Program will be using for this public education campaign is Maurice Sixto's Ti Sentaniz.

The title of the entire campaign is "*Yon Ayiti San Restavèk*" meaning "A Haiti Without Restavèk Children".

The slogans of the campaign are "*Restavèk, Non!*" (Restavèk Children, No!); "*Restavèk, Non! Kore Dwa Timoun Yo, Wi*" (Restavèk Children, No! Protect their Rights, Yes); "*Konbat Sistèm Restavèk: Wi Nou Kapab!*" (Let's Fight the Restavèk System: Yes, we can!).

Here are also some of the other messages under consideration:

- 1/ *Pran men m, edem prepare demen* (Take my hand, help me prepare tomorrow);
- 2/ *Timoun se moun* (Children are human beings);
- 3/ *Tout timoun gen dwa* (All children have rights);
- 4/ *Dwa timoun se dwa moun* (Children's rights are human rights);
- 5/ *Timoun restavek se timoun kou tout timoun* (Restavèk children are children like all other children);
- 6/ *Timoun restavek gen dwa menm jan ak tout lot timoun* (Restavèk children have rights just like all other children);
- 7/ *Timoun restavek gen dwa domi, manje, poze, jwe, lekòl, lanmou menm jan ak tout lot timoun* (Restavèk children have the right to sleep, to eat, to rest, to play, to go to school and to be loved just like all other children)
- 8/ *Respekte timoun restavek* (Respect restavèk children);
- 9/ *Pa fe vyolans sou timoun restavèk* (Do not use violence against restavèk children)
- 10/ *Pa fe abi sou ti fi restavèk* (Do not abuse restavèk girls)
- 11/ *Respekte timoun restavek menm jan ak pitit kay* (Respect restavèk children the same way you respect your own children)

2.3 Media

The media selected to convey these messages to the selected audiences include:

3.6 Conference on Restavèk Children

The Conference on Restavèk Children is a two-day event to be held on October 28 and 29, 2009 at the Hotel Montana. The conference will be one of the highlights of the campaign. Its main objective is to bring together all stakeholders, i.e. GOH, NGOs, the private sector, the religious sector, and the international community to publicly debate the issue of restavèk children and attempt to build consensus on the issue. Approximately 200 people are expected to attend.

3.7 Ti Sentaniz Comic Book in Schools

Based on the Ti Sentaniz animation, the drawings will be used to prepare a comic strip version of Ti Sentaniz to be distributed to select schools and universities and used as a medium for discussions and debate.

4. Partnerships

In the course of its work during the first two years of its existence, the PHR Program has partnered with close to 120 organizations. Among these organizations, several of them are special privileged partners to our program.

4.1 MAST

The PHR Program has been working with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor (*Ministère des Affaires Sociales et du Travail* ou MAST) for many months. PADF is one of the organizations supporting the ministry in a dissemination campaign for the ILO Conventions 138 and 182 on the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment and the Prohibition and Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor. During the course of this public education campaign, MAST will co-organize the Conference on Restavèk Children to be held on October 28 and 29, 2009, at the Hotel Montana.

4.2 IBESR

The *Institut du Bien-Etre Social et de Recherches* is an agency of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor. It is one of two GOH institutions with a mandate to protect children who are abused or mistreated. It has been a partner of PADF for many years.

4.3 BPM

The *Brigade de la Protection des Mineurs* (BPM) is the Child Protection Unit of the Haitian National Police. It is the only Haitian security force with the enforcement capacity to apply the law to protect children against abuse.

4.4 Maurice Sixto Foundation

Maurice Sixto was the creator of Ti Sentaniz. His foundation has carried on his work on behalf of restavèk children. The Maurice Sixto Foundation received a sub-grant from PADF to design and create a 20-minute animation depicting the life of Ti Sentaniz. The drawings prepared for the animation will also be used for the teeshirts and other print material, including the Ti Sentaniz comic strip to be distributed in schools and universities.

5.1 PHASE 1: First Three Months

This phase includes the preparation phase, the airing of the radio and TV spots announcing the Ti Sentaniz animation, the official launch, the airing of the Ti Sentaniz Animation and the Conference on Restavèk Children.

5.2 PHASE 2: First Evaluation

Immediately following the conference, the PHR Program will evaluate the first phase of the campaign: identify strengths and weakness, determine what worked best and what did not work, based on what was successful. develop new ways to replicate this success and seek advice from other communications specialist, including but not limited to PADF's Senior Communications Director.

5.3 PHASE 3: Last Two Months

During this phase, Ti Sentaniz will be aired on radio stations, tee-shirts will be designed and used strategically, and the Ti Sentaniz comic strip will be published and distributed to schools and universities where students will be encouraged to speak and debate the topic.

5.4 PHASE 4: Second Evaluation

A second evaluation will take place at the end of the campaign to determine whether the campaign was successful or not as a whole.

6. Monitoring & Evaluation

Notwithstanding the two evaluations, continuous monitoring of this campaign will be critical in determining its success or its failure. A few simple indicators can be developed to measure data related to campaign impact.

6.1 Audience Recall

Estimated numbers of target audiences and audience recalls will be used for television and radio station shows related to Ti Sentaniz.

6.2 Conference Evaluation

Number of participants will be used a one quantitative indicator with participant evaluation used as a qualitative indicator. Secondary numbers such as media coverage, articles in newspapers and others will be used.

6.3 Campaign Evaluation

The campaign evaluation will be sub-contracted to an external communications expert.

6.4 Final Report

A final report will be drafted in English and submitted to USAID.

ENDNOTES

ⁱ A Haiti Without Restavèk Children

ⁱⁱ Cadet, Jean-Robert "Restavec: From Haitian Slave Child to Middle Class America" Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998.

ⁱⁱⁱ In Dejarlais, R., Eisenberg, L., Good, B., and Kleinman, A. "World Mental Health: Problems and Priorities in Low-Income Countries" New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.160-163, 1995.

^{iv} See Dejarlais et al. cited above, p.161.

^v See Dejarlais et al. cited above, p.162.

^{vi} United States Department of State "Trafficking in Persons Report: 2009" Washington, D.C., 2009.

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