

President William Clinton's Address to the Second Annual International Congress of the Haitian Diaspora. Sunday, August 9, 2009 Trump International Beach Resorts Sunny Isles Beach, Florida

PRESIDENT WILLIAM CLINTON: Good morning. Please be seated. I don't want you to be tired, so sit down. I got up at 5:00 this morning to come and I think one of us being tired is enough. I want to thank Dr. Lauredan for that introduction. I really liked it. When you're actually in office as president, no one is supposed to introduce you, they are just supposed to say, "The President," and you show up. But they always play a song when you come in the room so that's how you know when to talk. And even though there was no song, I liked the introduction. I used to tell people that the worst thing about being leaving office was that no one played a song when you walked in the room. For the first three months after I left office, I was lost. I never knew where I was because they never played the song.

Madam Prime Minister, I'm glad to see you. Dr. Morris and Mr. Voltaire, thank you for your work with me, with the United Nations. I was honored to be invited to come down here today, and I want to get right down to business. I was delighted that Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon asked me to serve as the U.N. special envoy for Haiti to try to coordinate the efforts of the U.N. agencies and do a few other things, too. I want to begin by thanking you for your commitment to sticking together for your work on behalf of Haitians in the United States and your concern for your native land. Because this is the first time many of us are together, I would like to begin by just briefly outlining what I believe my job is as a U.N. special envoy. I guess I should start with the biggest drawback: Nobody gave me a pot of money to spend on this. But I have a very clear idea of what my mission is supposed to be, based in part on the two years of work I did for the United Nations in the tsunami-affected countries of South Asia; principally in Aceh, Indonesia, and Sri Lanka and Thailand and the southwest coast -- southeast coast of India.

First, my job is to do everything I can to make sure that all the United Nations agencies support the government of Haiti in the implementation of its recovery program with its focus on generating new jobs, improving the delivery of basic services and food security, and strengthening the infrastructure. There is no U.N. agenda in Haiti other than to help advance the plans and the aspirations of the government and the people. I thank the Prime Minister and the President for outlining its main goals. I'll be working with them with national and multinational donors, non-governmental groups, philanthropists, businesspeople, and I hope with many of you, to transform those plans into specific actions. My work is and will continue to be in complete alignment and coordination with the Haitian government in so far as I can do that. I will not manage the U.N. peacekeepers, nor will I be involved in domestic Haitian politics. Second, I will support greater disaster prevention, mitigation, and recovery efforts. We need to ensure that people in their homes and the infrastructure are better prepared for the storms that will surely come in the future. The work already being done there now proves that this will create jobs and provide the opportunity in many cases to build back better, to do more to mitigate the effects of future disasters. I want everything from rebuilding the buildings as well as possible to reforestation for the strategies that make the trees worth more planted than cut for charcoal, and with work that improves the ability to withstand the storms. Typically, when a hurricane hits Florida or any place in the United States, 80 percent of the damage is done by the wind, mostly to buildings that have not been built to higher specifications, and 20 percent of the damage is done by the water. In Haiti it was exactly the reverse. So one of the things I think that your government has done, Prime Minister, that makes a lot of sense is that immediately go about dredging and deepening

the waterways to make sure that if there are storms this year, you won't have 80 percent done by the water. And I saw some very impressive work around Gonaives, which made me hopeful in that regard.

You might be interested to know, by the way, that the only storm in my lifetime where we had the same experience you did was Katrina, because if you will remember, there was an extra channel dug from the Gulf of Mexico up to New Orleans and a metal gate on that channel broke. And it's instructive for Haiti's recovery efforts because the water was going so fast, so powerfully, that even though the dikes might have held the levees, the metal gate broke first and then the levees gave way. A subsequent study said that if the wetlands south of New Orleans had been in the same condition they were in 30 years ago, in other words, if all the trees and vegetation hadn't been torn down, the speed of the water would have been less than half what it was and the gates would have held. So we had our own experience in part of our country that Haiti experienced last year with those storms. And it's a good thing to remind ourselves that at least our goal ought to be, in Haiti and in the United States, to make sure that when the weather comes calling, at least the damage should be 80 percent from the wind and 20 percent from the water, not the other way around. And if that's the case, the damage will always be much less. The third thing that I'll seek to do is to get more international private sector investment in Haiti. With your help, we can improve the perception of Haiti by promoting opportunities made possible by the leadership of the current government.

In this regard, I'm glad to say that I intend to take a major trade mission to Haiti in October, I have already secured the support of the United States Department of Commerce, the United States Department of Agriculture, and tomorrow morning I'll see the Secretary of Energy. And I'm going to try to get them all to support this. Between now in October we are going to identify specific opportunities in agriculture, construction, textiles, tourism, and other sectors to create jobs and increase incomes in both urban and rural areas. Businesses need growth, imports, and reliable, affordable power and financing. I know that many of you here are concerned about hurdles that can undermine the confidence of investors and their willingness to invest. But separately and together, the President, Prime Minister Pierre-Louis, and various parliamentarians have told me they are committed to making Haiti an easier and better place to do business. And I noticed the recent announcement today that shortened length of time between an investment proposal and approval. It is a very good beginning. I also hope that the recent change in the travel advisory status by the United States and Canada will help. I lobbied very hard for that. And may I say, unlike temporary protective status, questions must be resolved by the Department of Homeland Security. That issue was resolved in the State Department, so I had a better in. The fourth thing I intend to do is to encourage donors who have made commitments to honor them and to do so promptly. There are about \$400 million almost committed to projects in Haiti, but unfulfilled pledges do not replace irrigation systems or replenish forests or build roads or power systems.

I've been doing this a long time now, and one of the things that I resolved to do when I was president that the United States, you may know, spends a smaller percentage of its budget on foreign citizens than almost any other country. It's really a holdover from the Cold War when we provided a defense umbrella and the Europeans provided the aid. But after the Cold War, we never caught up because we had until 2006 a congress hostile to that. It was a -- the congress has now approved a substantial increase in aid, and I think that you'll get more than your fair share. Prime Minister recently saw the Secretary of State's Chief of Staff, Cheryl Mills, who has been down here a couple of times already,

who has a deep personal commitment to this project. But I am going to be going all over the world to try to hector every last dime out of everybody who promised to give money at that donors' conference, and I'll continue to do it. The fifth thing that I'm supposed to do is try to increase the contributions of philanthropists, nongovernmental organizations, and civil society groups to recovery and to development, and to do everything I can to get so they'll work together more so that their combined efforts have greater impact without implication or wasting scarce resources, and that all this money is spent insofar as humanly possible in a way that is consistent with the priorities of the Haitian government's development plan. Now, this may not seem like a big deal, but Haiti has 10,000 nongovernmental organizations doing something. And dearly as I can plea, that's all you hear about that. As nearly as I can figure, there's no central list, nobody can really say that. And I have -- just since I agreed to do this, I have been deluged with e-mails from people I don't know and from people who are friends of mine that I didn't know were involved in Haiti.

I can say that one of the most rewarding aspects of the work I did in the tsunami area was the way we got coordination as never before from all the U.N. agencies and all the NGOs and we formed a board and they worked together and then they sent out information to all the smaller NGOs. It really made a very significant difference. And I think you can talk to people in any of those areas who were affected saying that that was the number one thing they noticed that -- that this had happened. Now, to be fair it may be harder here because, with the exception of India, you have more NGOs per capita operating down there than anybody else. But nobody's got a list, nobody really knows what's going on. A lot of the stuff is really good that's going on. But we need -- just think what would happen if we all put our heads together and nobody overlapped anybody else, and everybody had a copy of the development program, absorbed it, and said, "This is what I'm doing against this." So we will try to do that. The sixth thing I will do, insofar as I possibly can, is to present the best possible image of Haiti to the rest of the world. The other day a guy came up to me at an event I was doing up in New York for a friend of mine, and he said, "You know, in the '80s, I ran a big textile operation in Haiti, and I thought they were the best people I ever worked with. All I had to do was train the people." He said, "They were so loyal, they worked hard, they were great. We made a ton of money." He since has retired from this industry and he gave me the name of someone still active. He said, "You ought to call this guy. He can get you a lot more to invest." Because he had personal knowledge, not something he read in the newspaper, not something he heard. Bad news is always more compelling than good news, I know. But I will say this, and I had nothing to do with it, but I'm sure all of you have noticed this recent spate of articles lauding Haiti for the way the AIDS problem has been handled there, against all the odds and all the economic hardships, the dramatic improvements in every aspect of that.

And I have spent a lot of my life working on this all over the world. We have -- we sell medicine in 70 countries and have offices in 40 countries working on HIV and AIDS, and I can tell you that it's made a real impression. People have read it, and they say, "Oh, I didn't know that, I didn't know that." We need to give people the opportunity to read other stories that they didn't know about. And I'm going to do all I can to help that. Finally, I am committed to doing everything I can to -- involving the Haitian diaspora, not just in the United States, but also in Canada and Europe, in this endeavor. I know that many of you have already got up activities in Haiti. I know that many of you have tried and maybe been frustrated in the past to do more. But I think that we are on the verge of really being able to make some significant changes, and so I think we have to go forward from here. When I was in Haiti about a month ago, I traveled with President Preval to Gonaives and I saw some of the dredging

work. But the most important thing to me he was walking through the streets of a neighborhood and talking to people. I met one woman who lost six of her eight children in the floods, and she was determined to fight for the survival and recovery of what was left of her family. I think very often people think about countries they don't know and they just look at GDP numbers or headlines or whatever, and you forget there are real people involved there. And those people, that woman's courage and her children's future, are worth our best efforts.

Now, I know that a lot of you, as I said, are already involved here, but I want to talk a little bit about some very specific things that I saw and that we are already doing in addition to the general description of my job. First, I try to get a feel for the landscape. The Prime Minister will tell you when I was in Haiti, I tried to meet with every group I could meet with. I practically went out on the street and begged people to come in and talk to me. I met with leaders of the legislative branch, with nongovernmental organizations, with businesspeople, with leaders of a women's group and women business leaders separately, with bilateral donors, and with the U.N. officials that are there. I visited a mango exporting business in Port-au-Prince and was shocked to learn that half the mangos that come off the tree are never exported because they get bruised on the way from falling off the tree to the markets in New York City where I live. And I was interested to learn how little money it would take to secure a higher percentage of that crop and how much more could be done there. I talked to people about the prospect of reducing cane ethanol with the same technology used in Brazil. You might be interested to know, I think first that could stop you from having to import any oil, and secondly you can find a ready market in the United States because being in the Caribbean, you're not subject to the 53 cent a gallon tax that would be imposed if Brazil tried to send that cane ethanol directly to the United States. And to -- for those of you who don't live with this the way I do, because I spend a lot of time on this energy stuff, if you make ethanol from corn, it's the cheapest way to make it, but you only get about 2.3 gallons for every one gallon of oil it takes to make, and it's 30 percent less efficient. If you make it from agricultural waste, so-called cellulosic ethanol, with today's technology you can get about four gallons for every one gallon.

So it's about twice as good, but it costs more than twice as much to do the conversion. By far the most efficient process in the world is what the Brazilians do. They get now eight to nine gallons of fuel from cane ethanol. And they're beginning to be very concerned about the ability of their country to produce more, and their investors are looking for other places to do this because they have to be worried about deforestation. The Amazon rainforests are still being rather rapidly deforested, even though the government is trying to protect it. And approximately 20 percent of all of the oxygen on Planet Earth that is generated from land as opposed from the water comes out of the Amazon rainforest. So they are very sensitive of this. They don't use rainforest land, but the more land they use, the more it pushes the soybean farmers and the cattlemen and others back into the rainforests. I just went to Brazil and spoke with a huge ethanol conference. There must have been 2,000 people there who were involved in this, and the one thing they kept saying is we know this is great technology, we know this is a great product, but we have to find other places to produce it. And I said, "Have I got a deal for you?" So we -- I think this is -- this is not some kind of sky deal, this a real possibility that I believe we should aggressively look into.

I think there are some other things that are more mundane. Besides the mango business, I went into a neighborhood to look at people producing these. Do you know what this is? There is a neighborhood in Port-au-Prince that had a very high unemployment rate and a very a high crime rate.

They formed a community counsel, I met with them all, about nine people run by a very charismatic 27-year-old man, who could either be a movie star or a politician, and what he did was to get people to go collect the garbage off the street. And then -- that took a lot of people. Then they had people separate the garbage into organic material, paper, plastic, metal and glass. No market for any of it; they started doing it. Then they shredded and mashed up the paper, cut it into little bits, and saturated it with water and mixed it with sawdust from a local furniture manufacturer. And the furniture manufacturer gives them sawdust; he's just glad to have somebody clean up his place. Then they develop their own hand press. It's very interesting. They put these -- something about this shape and about this long into a canister, and they put 12 of them under this hand press. And then they pull the press down and it squeezes all the water out. It takes like a third of the volume out. Then they slice it and dry it and you get this. They sell these for a penny apiece, approximately in American dollars. And with four of them, you can cook dinner. It is approximately one-fifth the cost of charcoal for them. The people I met with show you there are always people working. You've got people collecting the garbage, you've got people sorting the garbage, you've got people making this, then you've got to have people go sell this. So you get 10 or 20 times as many jobs as you would cutting down trees and making charcoal. And what they recommend is you make dinner, if you cook it in a pot by taking three of these and putting them in the pot and then breaking up a fourth one so it's easier to light, and it will burn about 45 minutes.

Now, what is -- what's the importance of this? They told me that if they could find -- they're going to make it with the organic material, the food junk, that they're going to make fertilizer and provide organic fertilizer to the farmers at a low cost. They said if they could sell just one, just one, of the plastic metal and glass mass they are collecting for recycling, they could continue to sell this at a penny apiece. Now, consider what -- this could be done in every neighborhood in Port-au-Prince, it could be done in every city in Haiti. And if it were successful, it would sweep the poor urban areas of the world. This could be done everywhere. Labor intensive and environmentally responsive. So I brought about two dozen of these home and I just carried them around with me, just showing people, because this is new, it's not a high tech deal. So when I was down there recently, Madam Prime Minister, with my friend James Lee Witt, who was my director of emergency management when I was president, he reminded me that we have a friend in my native state of Arkansas who needs lots of recycled plastic, and he's going to come down there, and if he starts buying this plastic, we'll be off to the races. And this could literally provide employment for thousands of people and an enormous incentive to leave the trees standing, make money out of the fruit trees and other things, and reconstitute the soil of Haiti while solving a big headache.

And parenthetically, the council of citizens told me that the crime rate in the neighborhood had dropped precipitously because people had jobs and because they were proud of their neighborhood; it was clean, it was healthy, they had something going, they had something to look forward to in the morning.

So this is something where not a lot of investments are required. I've just got to find somebody to buy the plastic or the metal or the glass, and we'll be not cooking with gas, cooking with this. Let me mention just a couple of other specific things. In October, in addition to the trade mission that I intend to bring, the Inter-American Development Bank is going to hold a big trade conference for businesspeople and investors, not just for the United States, but also from Canada, Europe, Latin America, and the Caribbean. So I think we may see some real movement there. And I believe that

there will be some -- there will be a lot of interest in tourism investment now that the travel advisories have been changed, and more than the heartiest, loyal Haiti lovers will be able to imagine going to the Citadel in safety and to other places. I think is this a big deal potentially if we can get it going. Let me mention just a couple of other things that we've been working on. Madam Prime Minister's former employer, Mr. Soros, has set up an economic development fund called Haiti Invest beginning with \$25 million, with a goal of raising \$150 million for investments garment manufacturing, agriculture, logistics, and other things. I lost my place, I lost my page. Give me just a minute. The second thing that has happened is an Irish businessman, Michael Carey, and a group of other Irish businesspeople have established a new foundation called Soul of Haiti Foundation after a number of visits, and have offered to host a delegation of Haitian businesspeople in Ireland to demonstrate that they should do business with them and have more joint ventures. And let me just say that that's the best of all. We need more joint ventures so to build an entrepreneurial capacity of the country. Third, James Lee Witt, as I said my former emergency management director, has committed a quarter of a million dollars to provide disaster preparedness training for women in Haiti. And that's very important because women are often most affected by natural disasters and most effective in communicating life-saving information to their families when one strikes.

Their activities will be coordinated with the other ongoing efforts, and the United Nations is now helping to identify partners in civil society and government to make sure that we don't duplicate or undermine anything else that is already going on. Fourth, one of the people I took with me to Haiti in March, an Indian, remarkable man, Desh Deshpande, who is a member of my global initiative that gathers people like him from around the world at the opening of the U.N. every year, has offered his help and his foundation's help to expand school feeding in Haiti. The Deshpande Foundation runs a school feeding project in India that currently provides nutritious hot meals every day to one million schoolchildren. And he can really help us a lot, and I think I can get some more money for this. When I was president in my last couple of years, I got the Agriculture Department to give me \$300 million to offer to the poorest countries in the world to feed kids a good meal every day, but they had to come to school to get the meal. The first year we did it, school enrollments increased by 6 million. It cost \$50 a year a student to feed them and to get them in school.

So, Madam Prime Minister, if we are going to rebuild these schools, we want the kids to show up and have the parents do the work, and I think that's something we can do. I'm happy to say that when he was in office, President Bush commended this program. President Obama has supported it. Congress has supported it. It has enormous bipartisan support. It's one of the most cost effective things that the United States does to help children in developing nations get an education. So I believe if we can develop the capacity -- I went to a school feeding program that Michael Sean helps, it's a group of nuns run in Port-au-Prince. You've got a lot of this going on. But to be able to do it on a nationwide basis at a scale appropriate to the need would be very, very important.

Fifth, a friend of mine that -- who I believe is now the largest electricity provider in the Dominican Republic, Rolando Gonzalez Bunster, has offered to install initially five windmills with 80 megawatts of capacity that are made by Vesta, the number one manufacturer of windmills in the world; very high quality. They are now unassembled next door to the Dominican Republic. They were originally intended to go there through a deal that I have to put together with the government of Finland's aid program, and for reasons unrelated to their quality, the Dominican's have decided not to do them. So he wants to just give the windmills to Haiti. And I think it's a very, very good thing to do because if we

can put them up in the right place and have adequate distribution -- it's a big issue -- then we have to work through all the details, but this would provide renewable energy at competitive prices within a matter of months. You can build -- you can do this a lot faster than you can build new plants. And so I believe -- let me just say, one of the other things I do in my foundation life that has nothing to do with what I'm doing here, is to where I work in 40 cities on 6 continents on energy issues, including how to turn solid waste into clean energy like this, closes landfills, do things that need to be done. And we did a detailed study of a lot of options around the world. For example, solar energy is really expensive now because of what's in the photovoltaic cells, so they haven't caught on in many places. But now in India and in Africa, people have figured out how to do it much more cheaply, and so there is a lot of that being done. The most efficient way to do it is to find a place that's really hot and sunny all the time and build an old-fashioned power plant and just put a huge solar reflector up there, let it heat water, and generate a massive turbine and generate electricity. There are a few places you can do that: The southwest United States, the western desert in India, Australia. Most places you can't do it. But there are opportunities and wind everywhere and there are opportunities for low-cost solar, there are opportunities for tidal energy in and around Haiti. And our surveys concluded that the Caribbean in general was the place where it would be easiest for people to become completely energy inventive. And your neighbors not far away in Puerto Rico have us working on a project to try to literally figure out how they could become energy inventive because they get a lot of tax breaks, as you probably know, for manufacturing to go down there because it's the poorest part of the United States and the wages are lower, but the lower wages have been almost completely offset for the last three years by the enormous cost of importing all their fuel. So they are really taking this seriously. And they are also figuring out that they can generate a heck of a lot more jobs if they provide all their own energy and then they maintain the infrastructure to do it.

So we should explore this here because I think there are a lot of jobs for you and a lot of good investment opportunities, so we're working on that. I want to thank all these people for their commitments. This is just the beginning. Last year after the storms, we had a special session on Haiti in my global initiative, and about a dozen different nongovernmental organizations committed to spend \$130 million over a three-year period. We're going to do it again this year and try to raise more money. So this is a very important role here for nongovernmental groups who may be able to come up with solutions that then we can take national. And if we have one model that works, it's easy to go to the United States or the European Union or some other government and say, "Look at this. This should be done over here in Haiti. Here's the price, give us the money." So I think these are important things to begin. But the most important thing I can say today is, I consider every one of you liable to the success of this, and I think you know that or the Prime Minister wouldn't be here. It really matters. I can't tell you how strongly I feel about this temporary protective status and how strongly I feel that we should gain. But to be fair, I have sat in President Obama's chair and I know what they are doing. And I have literally talked to nobody in the White House about this I have gone through the regular channels. But I can just imagine if I were there, I'd hear the conversation now: "President says, how do we send these people back? They just went through all these storms? I know it's tough here, but how can we do that and say they depend on our remittances for over 19 percent of the GDP last year? Even this year in the recession, 16 percent of the GDP will come from remittances." And then somebody says, "Well, it's not that we want to send them back, but what if do this, what will everybody else say? How will we draw the distinctions? We have people here from all over the world

who will make similar claims. Do we let them all stay? And if we're going to send some home and keep some, how do we make these distinctions?"

And, you know, America has people here from almost 200 countries, so and I don't know any of his, but I've been there, my guess is that in the end they'll do the right thing and will respond to what the Haitian community has asked for, what is in Congressman Alcee Hastings' resolution, that he had Kendrick Meek and Senator Bill Nelson and Congressman Charlie Rangel, and the Chairman of the House, they've all lobbied like crazy for this. So I feel pretty good about it. I'm sorry it's taking so long, but I have to defend the White House because I've been there, I know what's happening. Everybody is saying, "Of course we should leave these people here, but if we do, how do we make distinctions?" And that's what they are trying to work through. So I urge you all just keep up the pressure, keep telling people, you can't send people home, you've got to leave them here. Make the case positively. But do not do it in a hostile way because this is a complicated thing for them. They have to make a principle decision. Whatever decision they make they have to be able to justify, not just to Haitian-Americans, not just to Haiti, but to the whole wide world because the whole wide world is here in our country. That's one of the reasons that I have hope for America in the midst of all this economic mess. It's one of the reasons we've always been able to reinvent ourselves because the doors have been open enough to bring people in from everywhere, so we keep fertilizing our fields.

So I think we'll get this right, and I urge you to keep urging this course, but to do it in a way that's positive and affirmative because I don't think anybody up there is unsympathetic to the claims. I think that anybody who looks at this knows what an enormous burden it would be on Haiti if those 30,000 people were sent home right now.

Everybody understands what happens in the storms and there is an enormous feeling in Washington that this government is serious, confident, straightforward, and capable of revolutionizing the future. So there is a lot of feeling about that. Well, that's what I wanted to say, that's my job, and I've given you my mission and my progress report. But the most important thing I can say is I haven't had a better meeting than the one I had with the Haitian diaspora community in New York the other day. I took voluminous notes and I got more information there about what they think needs to be done in order to get more Haitian-Americans involved in Haiti and investing money back there, including the dual citizenship issue than I had gotten from any other meeting I've had. So I just want to say again I'm grateful to be here, I'm grateful for everything you have already done. I'm an outsider, but I've been going to Haiti for more than 30 years and I know a little something about economics and I had a reasonably successful run at it. It is my opinion that this is by far the best chance that Haiti has had in the 35 years that I have been acquainted with it to strip the bonds of the past; by far the best chance. And the more involved you are, the better the odds get. So do not be deterred. If you've been disappointed in the past, try to find some other way to do something. If you're doing something now, try to do more of it. If there's somebody who is not here who could help us, ask them to help. And if you have any suggestions for me, for goodness' sakes, give them.

I am going to establish an advisory committee of the members of the diaspora you may want to communicate through, but you can just e-mail me or write me directly to the -- to my office in Harlem, or in the United Nations where I also have an office. But Haiti needs you now and Haiti can take your help now and do something with it. So let's make this a success. Thank you very much, and God bless you all.