

**CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

**Ms. Loune Viaud  
Executive Director  
Zanmi Lasante/Partners in Health  
Statement to the UN Security Council  
3 April 2019**

Thank you, Mr. President.

Mr. President, your Excellencies, Civil Society colleagues, Ladies, and Gentlemen,

First, I would like to thank you for the invitation to provide an update on the situation in Haiti. Haiti is not only the country I was born in, but also the country I have dedicated my life to serving.

My name is Loune Viaud and I am the Executive Director of Zanmi Lasante, one of Haiti's largest non-governmental healthcare providers and sister organization to Partners in Health based in Boston. Partners in Health is a social justice organization providing access to education and healthcare to communities across four continents.

I am honored to have the opportunity to brief the Security Council today on the situation of women and girls in Haiti. I would like to thank MADRE and the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security for their efforts to ensure that the voices of women in civil society are heard.

Over the last 30 years, Haiti has been through significant challenges, including the devastating 2010 earthquake and cholera outbreak from which we continue to recover. We have also seen a number of positive changes in my country: roads exist where they never had before, access to health services increased, and we are seeing better partnerships between local organizations and their foreign counterparts on health and education.

Yet, much more remains to be completed. The UN promised to right Haiti's wrongs in 2014, four years after the cholera outbreak began and we hold you to this promise.

My briefing today will focus on three specific areas: addressing inequality, sexual and gender-based violence and women's political participation.

### **Addressing Inequality**

Addressing the root causes of conflict has been increasingly highlighted by this body and the broader UN system as an important priority. Years after the UN first deployed a peace operation in Haiti, my country serves as an example of how failure to do so can contribute towards instability.

Today, women in Haiti face barriers to achieving basic access to services, education and healthcare. For example, Haiti has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world: 359 women die for every 100,000 live births in Haiti.

Watching a woman die because she reached us too late: seeing families devastated after losing a mother, a wife, or a daughter in childbirth are images one cannot forget. They haunt me, and they should haunt all of us. Childbirth should not be a death sentence in Haiti.

Cancer is another issue that primarily affects women in Haiti – 75% of our patients are women. In partnership with the Haitian Ministry of Health, Zanmi Lasante has provided free cancer care to patients across the country for almost 20 years. Today, I am friends with Roselene Jean, our first cancer patient. Without the care we provided, she would no longer be with us.

Mr. President, members of the Security Council, no woman should die in Haiti because of lack of access to obstetric care or cancer.

Lack of access to women’s healthcare poses one of the greatest challenges to development in Haiti. Reinforcing the relationship between sustainable development and peace and security should therefore be central to the way the Council addresses the situation in Haiti and is fundamental to placing my country on the path to peace and stability.

### **Sexual and Gender Based Violence**

The difficult work to end sexual and gender-based violence in Haiti remains a silent fight. It is a topic no one wants to discuss, yet it can change a young woman’s life forever. Over 40% of all sexual assault victims in Haiti are under the age of 25, with many that we serve below the age of 15. I speak on behalf of all survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, when I say to you: impunity for violence against women and girls in Haiti, must end.

We need not only a comprehensive law on gender-based violence, we must also educate Haitians to respect women and girls and shift the harmful social norms that cause the violence in the first place. The Security Council and the United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti (MINUJUSTH) should work with the Haitian government to advance the adoption of the draft Penal Code, and ensure the definition of sexual assault under the code is based on consent. This would bring the Penal Code further in line with international legal standards and ensure access to justice for survivors.

As service providers, we know the critical importance of medical care for survivors; we also know that throughout the country, these services are insufficient. Survivors of gender-based violence need timely and comprehensive care to address the risks of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV as well as unwanted pregnancies. This means psychosocial support, medical intervention, and fair and safe access to the justice system.

### **Women’s political participation**

Haiti is a small country full of larger-than-life women. These women have helped their communities and families flourish despite the most dire and tragic of conditions. These communities and families sacrifice everything for their children’s education and survival. Yet, girls

have limited role models or advocates in Haiti's halls of power. For a better future for our mothers, sisters, cousins, and daughters, we must support women's participation in public and political life at all levels, and advocate for better laws, affordable health care, education, and justice.

The women of Haiti have so much to offer their country and the world. However, we need your help to make that happen.

- The Council should call on MINUJUSTH to build the capacity of local organizations to provide the government to ensure high-quality gender-sensitive services for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence. This work must continue through the upcoming transitional period and UN mission reconfiguration.
- The Council should ensure sustainable and continued funding and mission support in addressing urgent humanitarian needs of women and girls, including sexual and reproductive health services for gender-based violence survivors, and services in the wake of natural disasters.
- The Council should also call for Haiti to take the important step of creating greater legal protections for women and girls. This should include supporting the adoption of a comprehensive law on gender-based violence and sections of the 2017 criminal code reform proposal that seeks to fill some of the protection gaps for survivors of sexual, and gender-based violence.
- In any transition or drawdown, the Council should ensure any positive gains made on gender equality are preserved and properly resourced.
- In its consideration of the forthcoming report on MINUJUSTH and in any briefings, senior UN officials should include information on efforts to ensure women's full and meaningful participation in all aspects of the parliamentary elections, including as candidates, voters, and as part of formal electoral mechanisms.

Mr. President, women and girls in Haiti want to stay hopeful. As the author, Rebecca Solnit has said, "hope is not a lottery ticket you can sit on the sofa and clutch, feeling lucky. It is an axe you break down doors with, in an emergency." The emergency is now.

Thank you, Mr. President.