

## **Fooling the sun; no fooling the rain: towards long term, comprehensive social housing strategy in Haiti**

Moderator: **Theo Sither**, *Mennonite Central Committee*

Speakers: **Collette Lespinasse**, *Support Group to Repatriates and Refugees (GARR)*  
**Georges Werleigh**, *Institute for Leadership Training and Technology (ITECA)*  
**Jean Ariel Joseph**, *Haitian Senate*

Access the full presentation [here](#)

### **Description**

Housing remains an elusive dream for the hundreds of thousands of Haitians who still live in displacement camps in and around Port-au-Prince. An effective social housing policy that guarantees safe and dignified housing to vulnerable families was needed long before the January 2010 earthquake. To date, no such plan has been created.

Deteriorating conditions in camps, ongoing forced evictions and disasters like Hurricane Sandy in October 2012 highlight the urgency of ensuring that all families have access to adequate and affordable housing. Although private/public partnerships are being envisioned in a GOH draft housing policy, there have not been broad consultations with those most in need of a comprehensive, human-

rights approach to housing. GOH and donor efforts have thus far focused on short-term rental programs that ignore the structural causes of Haiti's housing crisis.

Haitian civil society organizations and grassroots groups are calling for governmental intervention against illegal forced evictions; consultation of displaced communities, especially women, in the formulation of housing plans; housing that meets international standards in terms of safety, affordability, habitability and accessibility; and the designation of public land on which to build. The third commemoration of the earthquake was an occasion to look towards such permanent solutions to the housing crisis in Haiti.



Georges Werleigh - ITECA



Colette Lespinasse - GARR

## Analysis

This panel was devoted to the exploration of different models of housing being used by different organizations in Haiti. Theo Sitter of Mennonite Central Committee introduced the panel in context: officially, the number of people in need of housing in Haiti has decreased, but there are still over 350,000 people living in tents; these people face unsafe conditions and the threat of eviction. In addition, while several thousands have been moved to temporary accommodation but have no indication of what national plans or projects will help them obtain permanent housing.

Colette Lespinasse, Executive Director of the Support Group to Repatriates and Refugees (GARR), noted that the main challenges to a permanent housing solution for the most vulnerable are building on arable, unoccupied land; financing; and fostering trust between

*“Several thousands have been moved, but only to temporary accommodations, and we have no indication of what national plans will eventually provide them with permanent and dignified housing.”*

**Theo Sitter**

the government and the communities impacted. Lespinasse added that because of the lack of a public policy about housing in Haiti, people are building their own homes as they did before the quake. The current government program, which gives people money to rent homes in shanty towns, is unsustainable.

If another earthquake were to occur, Lespinasse warned, Haiti would face the same disaster as it did in 2010. Lespinasse’s primary ask to policy makers: a ***comprehensive national housing policy that would account for the diverse needs of the population it is slated to serve.***

*“We are building the same products that caused the catastrophe in 2010. If we had another earthquake – and it’s entirely possible – we would relive the same devastation.”*

**Colette Lespinasse**

This reorganization of space should address land, because the land and housing reform are highly connected. It should also address decentralization. A successful policy could lead to increased job opportunities from the local construction industry as well as a

decrease in violence against women, if they are able to reside in places where they can “regain dignity and live in peace”.

*“The majority of those who have left the camps still do not have adequate housing.”*

**Colette Lespinasse**

Georges Werleigh, of the Institute for Leadership Training and Technology (ITECA), highlighted his organization’s achievements in building housing for vulnerable populations outside of Port-au-Prince, and advised that ‘reconstruction’ should not only include building houses, but also address food security, decentralization and agriculture, toward a comprehensive solution. ***Any housing policy should be one of inclusion and establish linkages among the state, foreign and local NGOs, and local partners.***

Jean-Ariel Joseph, the Secretary General of the Haitian Senate, recommended that ***the psychological and economic aspects of housing and construction in general be considered.*** Construction should progress based on the community context - for example, housing complexes in rural areas must include the construction of schools so that all children can obtain an education.

Joseph also recommended that the school constructed include the centers where children can use useful trades, such as working with livestock or in fisheries, at the same time



**Representative Frederica Wilson**

that they are receiving a formal education. Seizing on what turned into a familiar theme, he noted that housing should include “everything”: decentralization, education, etc.

***Rep. Frederica Wilson (D-FL) joined the panel and spoke about her devotion to Haiti. She detailed a current Habitat for Humanity program in the country, where free houses are being built for families who will be allowed to live in them for five years at no cost. After five years, the family is expected to pay rent to Habitat to cover both the previous five years and the subsequent years. She also highlighted an effort by one NGO to plant five million trees in Haiti, which would help protect the country from natural disasters, “help with farms, and ensure that peasants have work.” She encouraged others within the international community who had pledged money to Haiti to hold themselves accountable to what they had promised.***