

## Grantees Aid Quake Victims Arriving in Phila.

JAN. 12, 2010 IS DESTINED to become a date as familiar to the people of Haiti and their relatives and friends around the world as Sept. 11, 2001 and Dec. 7, 1941 are for Americans. The earthquake that hit Haiti – a country already devastated by chaos and political unrest – took an unimaginable toll. The Haitian government estimates that more than 200,000 people have been killed and more than 3 million people are in need of emergency services.

Not surprisingly, the Philadelphia legal community – both the public and the private bars – has stepped up to help. In particular, immigration and adoption are the focus of their efforts.

Bar Foundation grantee organizations HIAS Pennsylvania, Nationalities Service Center and Support Center for Child Advocates are the key players in two local programs. Of course pro bono attorneys from the private bar are helping with these efforts, especially Ethan Fogel, a Dechert LLP partner and director of pro bono in its Philadelphia office, and Jennings Durand, also of Dechert. As Durand related, “After the earthquake in Haiti, Ethan and I reached out to HIAS and Council’s Judith Bernstein-Baker to begin exploring ways that Dechert could help Haitian children whose lives have been turned upside-down by the tragedy.”

As a result of discussions, HIAS PA, the Support Center for Child Advocates, and the Dechert lawyers organized the Philadelphia Initiative for Haitian Children, a network of groups interested in helping the children of Haiti. This group convened a Feb. 5 kickoff meeting that included leaders from the local Haitian community, representatives of children’s and immigrants’ services organizations, members of the Mayor’s Commission on African and Caribbean Immigrant Affairs, Partners in Health, local law and medical schools, and immigration lawyers, including an international adoption specialist.

At this initial meeting, the group identified particular tasks on which to focus short-term and long-term efforts and targeted several groups of Haitians in need of short- and long-term help. The Philadelphia Initiative for Haitian Chil-

By Amy B. Ginensky



dren decided to focus its efforts on specific groups of Haitians, including: those with special medical needs destined for the Philadelphia region; orphans already adopted (or in the process of being adopted) by Philadelphia families but who had not left Haiti before the earthquake; children orphaned by the earthquake;

and those (both adults and children) in need of legal help with their immigration status. As word of the Initiative has gotten out, a number of local law firms have volunteered to help staff immigration and adoption cases over the coming months.

Another initiative focused specifically on immigration assistance to the Haitian community in the region is being organized by HIAS and includes the Nationalities Service Center, the Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians, the American Immigration Lawyers’ Association Pro Bono Committee, pro bono attorneys and representatives from the Haitian community. In addition to outreach and education on immigration matters to the Haitian community, this network is offering legal services to help Haitians negotiate the complex immigration regulations that have been put in place to support them.

“The Obama Administration has extended special immigration rights to Haitians in the aftermath of this earthquake,” said Bernstein-Baker, executive director of HIAS and Council. These include humanitarian parole, which allows orphaned or medically needy children from Haiti to enter the United States temporarily to ensure that they receive the care they need, and temporary protected status, extended to Haitians already in the United States to protect them from deportation for 18 months and to allow them to work here since their safety would be at risk if they were deported.

“These are humanitarian efforts on the part of our government, but people are going to need legal assistance to be able to take advantage of the special immigration programs,” Bernstein-Baker said. “It is wonderful how people have stepped forward, offering their time and support.”

The work being done by HIAS, the Support Center for Child Advocates and the Nationalities Service Center, as well as the volunteer lawyers they work with, il-

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lustrates the importance of having strong public interest legal service organizations, which can respond appropriately and effectively to whatever crisis hits. Last year, we saw a number of our grantee organizations step into high gear to help with those suffering the most from the economic meltdown. This year it’s Haiti. The financial support given by the Bar Foundation to these organizations in terms of grants for operating expenses allows them to have the wherewithal to support those unbudgeted for emergencies. Of course, the only reason that the Foundation can help is because all of us in the legal community help us do so. We, and them, continue to appreciate your support.

Money is not the only way to help. If you want to provide pro bono services

as part of the Haitian Children’s Initiative, please contact Jennings Durand at [jennings.durand@dechert.com](mailto:jennings.durand@dechert.com). For relocation assistance, HIAS PA, Lutheran Family Services’ Resettlement Program and Nationalities Service Center are involved with providing housing, food and counseling for the Haitian earthquake survivors coming to Philadelphia for medical treatment. And, if you or your family want to donate housing or transportation or even clothing and bedding for Haitian refugees, contact Sarah Peterson at [speterson@hiaspa.org](mailto:speterson@hiaspa.org), Kathrin Ivanovic at [kivanovic@nscphila.org](mailto:kivanovic@nscphila.org) or Janet Panning at [janetp@lcfinspa.org](mailto:janetp@lcfinspa.org).

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