

## **LSE Government Department**

### **The HotSeat Videocast**

Dr Nilima Gulrajani

Discussing the state of development in Haiti after the earthquake.

**Dr Justin Gest:** It's been about one month since a tragic earthquake leveled an island, an economy, a society and a community. Hi, I'm Justin Gest and welcome to the Government Department Hot Seat. With us today to discuss the state of development in Haiti is Dr. Nilima Gulrajani. Thank you very much for being here. Well, let's get started. There's about 1.3 billion dollars pledged to Haiti worldwide right now so the problem seems like it's not funding. What is the big hindrance in Haiti in getting them back up on their feet?

**Dr Nilima Gulrajani:** Well, I think the problem facing Haiti is one where we have a natural disaster that's basically occurred on top of a man-made disaster, a developmentally man-made disaster. We have a country that has suffered from endemic corruption, we have a country that lacked proper public services and the impact of the earthquake was more severe than it would have been because of that man-made developmental disaster. Your question suggests that we need to think about what's next. We have the money, yes. In the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, the challenge was a logistical one. Now we're looking at less so a logistical one and more an infrastructure one, partly a logistics one but the aid is getting there, water is getting there, medical supplies are getting there. The question is how does one rebuild Haiti? I think there are certain things we can do, lessons we've learned from previous natural disasters, including the 2004 tsunami in Sri Lanka, that might help us think about how to rebuild Haiti. The first thing is we need some kind of temporary coordinating body. The US has played that function in the immediate aftermath but now one month on we need to think seriously about who plays that role whether it's the international community, whether it's a single government, what role the Haitians play in that coordinating role. After that we need to think about rebuilding some key infrastructure, particularly housing. We are going into the rainy season in Haiti and you have close to a million people living in tents, not all of which are waterproof, so figuring out how to house these people in durable housing over the course of the rainy season is sort of an immediate, well medium-term challenge over the next few months. Water and hygiene generally, sanitation services, are also another problem. We're finding increasing infectious diseases spreading in these camps so thinking about how one provides sanitation to these people who are literally homeless is another challenge in the long-run. We need to think about services like developing the health infrastructure. We've had stop-gap measures up until now to provide health services, or emergency services really, but thinking about long-term provision of health services for many amputees, many people who will have chronic conditions or conditions for the rest of their lives is another one we have to think about. And then law and justice I think is also really important. We have a situation where the prison collapsed so a lot of people, who some might argue weren't tried in a just manner, but nonetheless some who have been who are roaming free. We have a country that was previously a transit point for the drugs industry into the US, whether this decimates that industry or not is another

question. I think thinking about the provision of law and justice and police services; the police force lost half of it's force in the earthquake.

**Dr Justin Gest:** Well, these are some very daunting challenges ahead of us and none of them seem very easily remedied. What organizations, what donor organizations, would you say are best positioned to help? Who should people give to given these challenges?

**Dr Nilima Gulrajani:** Haiti was a donor darling, what we call a donor darling, loved by donors even prior to the earthquake. It's state capacity was quite weak and a variety of non-governmental organizations sprung up as beneficiaries of official foreign assistance. You often have organizations that have sprung up, in this context of a humanitarian disaster, you have a slew of organizations who have rushed to the scene, even more than the organizations you had working previously in Haiti. I think you need to think about an organization in terms of the capacity it has on the ground and history it has working in Haiti; I think those are two key determinates. There are a couple of organizations, if you were to ask me names that I could mention, but I think you need to make sure that the organization has a long history in Haiti and is working on the ground and has been working on the ground for a number of years.

**Dr Justin Gest:** So which organizations did you have in mind?

**Dr Nilima Gulrajani:** Oxfam had a long operation in Haiti. Another organization is called Partners in Health; an American-based NGO that for the last 30 years has been trying to provide health services to Haitians. And those are the kinds of organizations that I think can use the money to the greatest effect because they know the people, they know the way the country works.

**Dr Justin Gest:** Well, speaking of the people, ultimately any resolution will have to come in partnership with the Haitian people. What can we expect of the citizens and political leaders of Haiti?

**Dr Nilima Gulrajani:** I think if you again go back to the tsunami in 2004, the success in terms of rebuilding Sri Lanka, Aceh and so on was largely attributed to the determination of the local populace and the conviction that these were places that could be rebuilt. So I think one needs to consider the Haitian role in any kind of reconstruction or rebuilding effort. What role can they play? I think the first one is demanding responsible governance that will be in the medium-term by some international coordinating body presumably but in the long-term it's demanding responsible government from Haitian leaders themselves. I think a large part of Haiti's problems over the last few years has derived from, more than the last few years, pretty much since it's independence in the 1800's, has derived from poor government and elites infighting for political power that has really occurred to the detriment of development of the poorer people of Haiti. So I think responsible government would be the thing that Haitians need to be demanding and be involved with. And one hopes that there is a silver lining to this black cloud that is the earthquake where one has a chance to start from scratch perhaps.

**Dr Justin Gest:** Well with regard to the government, many have actually been criticizing the United States for taking over the response and relief effort in sort of a neo-colonial way. Do you think this is true?

**Dr Nilima Gulrajani:** I don't actually. I think that in the immediate aftermath, the US government did take over the airport to try to coordinate flights landing into Haiti basically to increase their capacity so I think the airport went from 10 flights a day to over 100 a day as a result of the US military basically taking over the airport. And I think that was a necessary step. I mean, even the president himself, his palace fell down on the threshold of his doorstep as he was walking in the palace seems to have crumbled and he and his wife survived but nonetheless there was a need for someone to take charge and the US took charge with the blessings of Rene Prival at the time. So I don't think one can accuse them of a neo-colonial interest. Subsequently, they have also coordinated with the UN saying that the UN will be handling the humanitarian relief effort which is now kind of on the end and now we're talking about more rebuilding and shelter as I mentioned and the Brazilians who had a peace-keeping mission are basically looking after security, so protecting these warehouses that have food, medical supplies and so on. And so the US now sees itself as having a logistical role basically and I think there's a sense of a division of labor here amongst the international interest in Haiti. So, no I don't think the US should rightly be accused, or can rightly be accused, of neo-colonial interests.

**Dr Justin Gest:** Alright, well that will do it. Dr. Nilima Gulrajani you are off the Hot Seat. Thanks very much for being with us. And thank you for being with us and stay tuned for next month's edition.