

## **Haitian labour leader calls for more solidarity, less charity, in relief efforts**

*CUPE pledges \$20,000, continued commitment to reconstruction*

VANCOUVER—Haitian labour leader Dukens Raphael stirred delegates on the final day of CUPE BC's 47th annual Convention with a moving speech that called for greater solidarity—not charity—between international civil society organizations and the people they're trying to help in his earthquake-ravaged country.

Raphael, secretary-general of Haiti's Confederation of Public and Private Sector Workers (CTSP), said the January 12 quake, which killed more than 300,000 people and left two million homeless with untold others displaced, has highlighted issues of inequality and neocolonial exploitation that have plagued his island country since its founding in 1804.

Raphael's speech was preceded by a short film that provided an update on the reconstruction effort. The film revealed the grim realities of tent cities collapsing under monsoon rains and families living in mud puddles with no access to adequate food, water or clothing. But it also revealed a proud people determined to rebuild the country on their own terms.

### *Exploitation a never-ending problem*

"The last image was that of a flag," said Raphael. "This means that Haiti stands alone as a country like any other. But it is a country with a complicated history that has been further complicated by the earthquake."

Raphael said that the calamity resulting from the earthquake was not especially unique in a country that has never been well governed, where 37 of its 47 presidents have been forcibly removed from office, and where extreme poverty often exists in close proximity to extreme wealth.

The day after the earthquake, he said, "we were very promptly helped out by our American 'friends'. A force of U.S. soldiers 20,000 strong took control of the airports and harbours without even consulting the president of the country. What we really need is not troops but medical aid, and food....Sturdier and more durable forms of shelter will be needed before the hurricanes come in June."

Raphael's organization was in no way spared by the earthquake. The CTSP, an affiliate of Public Services International, lost 300 members, including 26 electricians who are members of the electrical federation of which Raphael is also the president. The CTSP trade union office was completely destroyed by the earthquake.

### *Bilateral aid relationships work best*

Raphael paid tribute to CUPE and its members for demonstrating “the kind of solidarity that shows respect for us as the citizens we truly are. You contacted us to ask us what our needs were.”

The Haitian labour leader said that the first persons that should be consulted about the rebuilding of Haiti are the Haitian people. However, the international reconstruction plan presented at the United Nations on March 30 had no input from union groups, farmer’s associations or other private or public associations. Similarly, civil society organizations were not involved in the decisions surrounding the \$5.3 billion in aid that will be disbursed over the next 18 months by a foundation headed by former U.S. president Bill Clinton, the Special United Nations Envoy to Haiti.

Raphael said that the problem with most international aid is that a lot of the money that flows into developing countries like Haiti doesn’t get to the people who need it most. “Within your community there has been much fundraising,” he said. “My call to you is to ask that, notwithstanding all the international structures in place, to think of what kind of bilateral relationships can be set.”

### *CUPE pledges support*

CUPE BC president Barry O'Neill announced an additional \$20,000 donation to assist in the reconstruction effort, half of which comes from the B.C. division and the other half from CUPE National.

“CUPE BC and the delegates here will do all that we can to make sure that you can get what you need to rebuild your country. And we will keep on doing that until you don’t need any help,” said O'Neill.

“We never think, when we go out to help people in need, that it has anything to do with charity. And I can tell you that when we revisit this issue, we will be advised by Haitian workers—not international organizations—about what it is you need to rebuild your country.”

Raphael thanked O'Neill and CUPE BC delegates for their support.

“I guarantee that we shall move forward,” he said. “In the four days that I have been with you here, I have acquired a lesson in solidarity, and that strengthens my conviction that we should not accept charity but must move forward in solidarity. Long live CUPE!”

Following Convention’s adjournment, Raphael and other Haitian activists spoke at [a forum](#) held at the Hyatt Hotel. He also sat down for [an interview](#) with CUPE Communications.

For more information, visit [www.HaitiJustice.org](http://www.HaitiJustice.org).