

## **Podcast DAS Kenneth Merten, Haiti Special Coordinator, 5 April 2016**

My name is Kenneth Merten I am Haiti Special Coordinator at the U.S. Department of State.

I came to Brussels to meet with European Union Officials, officials at the European Commission to discuss our cooperation on Haiti. We have a long history of cooperation on Haiti not only in supporting the importance of democracy in Haiti but also in terms of helping Haiti develop and reach a status of economic and social development where it really can stand on its own feet and determine its own destiny.

Well we, number one, we have been deeply involved in the electoral process. The European Union had a large and excellent delegation of election observers to observe the previous two rounds of elections. Our hope, our fervent hope is that the Haitians will finish this round of elections and second round of presidential elections quite soon, in the coming months, and you know, we have also supported the elections observers in Haiti paying for 1.700 local observers who have been trained by us and by various organizations that we support. The goal is to have an election that reflects the will of the Haitian people and that that is done in a fair and transparent way and in a way that people can have confidence in.

The election mission isn't a joint project, the election mission the EU has their mission which they have organized. We have a separate one but they work together. And again the goal I believe is the same to help assure the Haitian people that the election is taking place in a transparent and credible way. Elections aren't the only area in which we cooperate together as I said earlier. The U.S. and the EU both are very active as two of the main donors in Haiti to try and help Haiti develop economically and socially, to help build institutions that ultimately will better serve the Haitian people in line with Haitian democracy so that really over time it is the Haitian state that is really helping meet the Haitians' peoples need and not foreign NGOs who, while they do terrific work, are not responsible to the Haitian people.

While I think in our opinion number one we need to have a democratically elected government in Haiti and that's something that we hope to see. We are encouraged by the steps that have recently been taken over the past two weeks in terms of getting a prime minister and a government in place and in terms of getting a provisional electoral council in place. But we would encourage that these actors take steps to quickly finish the elections because international financial institutions need a democratically elected government in place so they can continue their partnership with Haiti and so they can continue to disperse funds and budget support which you know is very important for a country like Haiti.

Number two; I think that over the medium term, once there is a democratic government in place, we would really like to see steps taken to facilitate investment and business creation in Haiti. One of the challenges I have been involved with Haiti for 28 years and one of the challenges I am convinced that has held Haiti back is a climate that is not favorable to investment. It takes a very long time to start a business in Haiti. So I think this is something we would like to work closely with the Haitian government on and with our EU partners as well to help the Haitians develop a climate that is favorable to business that will create jobs. Because over the long term for Haiti to be really self-sustaining they need to have the employment, they need generate the revenue, the tax revenue that will allow the government to

sustain itself. And the only way to get there is by growing an economy and that only happens through investment.

I think Haiti is still recovering from the 2010 earthquake. In a place like Port-au-Prince which had challenges before the earthquake in terms of infrastructure and quality of building these are repairs that aren't going to be quickly fixed. What I will say is that the Haitian people have really come back with and shown tremendous resilience and determination to rebuild their country and while the downtown of Port-au-Prince is nowhere near rebuilt yet they have continued to expand and build elsewhere in the country. And I think Haiti you know is on its way back and the important thing is that they need to complete this electoral cycle to keep that momentum of forward movement and upward movement, and that's what we would like to see them do so we can continue our partnership with them.