

**Speech of US Ambassador to Haïti, Kenneth Merten  
on the Occasion of the  
Official Launching of USAID « WINNER » Project  
Karibe Convention Center**

**Thursday, October 8, 2009**

Monsieur le Président,

Madame la Première Ministre,

Mesdames, Messieurs les Ministres,

Mesdames, Messieurs, les Parlementaires,

Distingués invités,

It is a real honor and a pleasure to be here today. As I said when

I arrived a few weeks ago, one of my main priorities as

Ambassador is to do all I can to encourage economic growth and

the creation of good jobs for Haitians. Haitians are talented and

willing to work hard. This is about giving them the

opportunities they deserve, so that families can prosper. This is

so that Haiti's next generation can grow up in the state of health, human dignity and peace that every child deserves.

As an old friend of Haiti, it affected me deeply when 2008 storms killed over 700 people and put many more at risk of starvation. It was a very hard blow for Haiti to bear, and we your American friends mourned along with all of you. The U.S. Government and the American people are at the forefront of donors who are making agricultural production. We are also promoting progressive environmental practices that will help Haiti for years to come.

Because of Haiti's environmental challenges the United States is delighted to announce it will finance USAID's WINNER project. We plan to invest over 126 million dollars over the next five years to increase agricultural production and encourage

good natural resource management. This is a project with very, very important implications for the Haitian economy and for Haiti's environment.

We all know that past programs to combat deforestation and prevent future flooding had limited success. For example, even though trees were replanted on the hills to prevent future flooding, people often were forced to survive by cutting them down for charcoal. They had no other economic alternatives.

The basic concept behind watershed management is simple, but has enormous potential. We must – and we can – pursue economic growth and protect the environment at the same time.

Watershed management has two parts: Up in the mountains, the project will stabilize deforested hillsides to prevent flooding.

On the plains beneath these same mountains, there will be more flood control measures and economic projects. These new economic projects will be designed together with local government and communities. They will create jobs in the regions, and they will help people make a good living with profitable, sustainable agriculture and other activities.

We are proud that the United States Agency for International Development has been a pioneer in promoting this integrated approach. Our first watershed management projects, started last year in Limbe and Montrouis, are already beginning to bear fruit. We hope to attract more donors to adopt this approach in the future.

I also want to congratulate the Government of Haiti for taking a very important step, by creating the “Comité Inter-Ministériel d’Aménagement du Territoire” under the leadership of the Prime

Minister. I am immensely pleased that the Government of Haiti is leading this effort, which is so vitally important to Haiti. Mr. President, Madam Prime Minister, we applaud the Government's initiative.

The Government of Haiti has a vital responsibility. In turn, my government will be responsible too, by keeping our promises.

The United States will continue working hard to help the Government of Haiti improve the safety and livelihoods of hundreds of thousands of Haitian families living in Gonaives, Cabaret, Cul de Sac, Limbe, Montrouis and other threatened areas.

This will take years of hard work, but this new strategy – watershed management – has the potential to turn back centuries of deforestation and decreasing agricultural output. This will

take years of sustained commitment, and new, progressive partnerships between communities, authorities, and the private sector,

We expect WINNER to increase agricultural production, generate more income for families, improve critical infrastructure, and establish public-private partnerships for development. Most importantly – through the new Rural Centers for Sustainable Development – there will be a technical training for Haitian local leaders. Haitians, including talented professionals such as Jean Robert Estime and other distinguished Haitians, should be in charge of directing the sustainable development of Haiti. We expect Haitian leaders will keep these efforts moving into the future, bringing more and more benefits to Haitian communities and businesses.

I also want to extend the thanks of my country to all the other donors who have been working hard to decrease environmental risks in Haiti. This is very much a team effort. We also thank the many local government representatives, private sector and producer groups who are here today. Again, such close cooperation, partnerships and leadership and resolve to face such challenges are essential to achieving the objectives of the WINNER project.

Finally, on behalf of the American people, I want to thank the people of Haiti. It is an honor for the United States to be your partner and friend. I congratulate all of the participants in WINNER, and I wish you all success.

Thank you.