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FOR IMMEDIATE DISTRIBUTION:
May 15, 2009

Mayor Manny Diaz and Commissioner Michelle Spence-Jones Join World Vision to Encourage South Floridians to 'Have A Heart for Haiti'



Mayor Manny Diaz, Commissioner Michelle Spence-Jones, Chairperson of Operation Hope for Haiti Julie Grimes, and Operation Hope for Haiti board member Nitin Motwani enjoy the Have a Heart for Haiti fundraising event. (Photo: Compliments of Hilton Bentley by Jim Stephens)

MIAMI, Fla. – The City of Miami and the international relief organization World Vision once again came together to raise funds to support rebuilding efforts in the island nation of Haiti following devastating storms in 2008. **On May 14, 2009, Mayor Manny Diaz and Commissioner Michelle Spence-Jones hosted “Have A Heart for Haiti,” a special fundraising evening to benefit “Operation Hope for Haiti,”** a community partnership project between the City and World Vision.

Friends of Operation Hope for Haiti such as representatives for Senator Bill Nelson and Congressman Lincoln Diaz-Balart, as well as Miami-Dade County Public Schools Superintendent Alberto M. Carvalho participated in the event. WPLG reporter Calvin Hughes served as master of ceremonies. In 2008, Hughes covered Haiti’s plight directly from the streets of Port-au-Prince in an effort to bring more awareness to the trials facing the island.

“In Miami, we know from experience how difficult it is to recover from the destruction that hurricanes leave behind, and know that help is always needed and deeply appreciated,” said Mayor Diaz. “Our community has given very generously in efforts to alleviate the suffering of

our neighbors in Haiti, and the severity of the conditions in the island calls for continued solidarity in our response and commitment to help this devastated country rebuild. We are grateful to our community leaders and partners who have pledged their support for Operation Hope for Haiti.”

There will be a minimum event donation of \$275 per person for the Have A Heart For Haiti fundraising evening. More than 130 people attended the event at the Hilton Bentley in Miami Beach and helped us raise close to \$40,000 that evening for this cause. One hundred percent of all proceeds raised at the event will go to World Vision for Operation Hope for Haiti.

“As Haiti’s closest American neighbor, we must not be idle bystanders watching this human tragedy unfold at our doorstep, but must make every effort to help the men, women and children who are suffering in silence,” said Julie Grimes, owner representative of the Doubletree Grand and Hilton Bentley hotels and the Chairperson of Operation Hope for Haiti, “Let us not only take action, but be a voice for the voiceless and wake up our nation to the cries for help.”

In the short time since the partnership’s launch in December 2008, Operation Hope for Haiti has mobilized various segments of the community to come together to aid the cause. In January, runners participated in the 2009 Miami ING Marathon and Half Marathon as part of Team World Vision to raise money for the partnership. Also in January, a “Day of Giving” for Haiti was held at more than 100 Starbucks locations in the greater Miami area.

The goal of Operation Hope for Haiti is to make an intentional, strategic difference in one devastated rural area creating a sustainable environment and setting a model for others to follow - Rebuilding Haiti, one village at a time.

The targeted area selected for the partnership is Hinche, population of 93,000 and the capital of the Central Plateau rural region, an area gravely impacted by the destructive storms. The River Guayamuc overflowed causing severe damage to property and lives with more than 750 families losing their homes. **World Vision has been working in this area for several years and, despite last year’s flooding and the global food crisis, the aid agency is committed to working with the local community in the coming years to recover and rebuild.**

The focus of the project, a \$1.5 million commitment over 3 years, will be to stem the threat of future flooding through the installation of watershed walls, anti-erosion structures and reforestation along the river. The project will employ over 1,000 people from the area and will be complemented by World Vision’s holistic interventions around health, education, food, agriculture and economic development.

Operation Hope for Haiti also recently launched a new website www.worldvision.org/operationhopeforhaiti that provides details and updates about the partnership as well as ways to get involved. Those interested in supporting the partnership can visit the website to:

- Make a **one-time** contribution
- Sponsor a child in Haiti **for \$35 a month**
- Join **Team World Vision** and **raise funds** for Haiti **by running** in the 2010 Miami ING Marathon and Half Marathon

Donation checks can be mailed to: World Vision (noted for: Operation Hope for Haiti), 7720 NW 36th St., Suite 228, Miami, FL 33166. Donations can also be made online.

For interviews with World Vision staff about **Operation Hope for Haiti**, please contact Laura Blank at (646) 245-2496 or lblank@worldvision.org.

For more event information on "Have A Heart For Haiti," please contact Katie Miller at 305-606-1245.

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