

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The objective of the present report is to examine the role and impact on the peace process of humanitarian assistance supported by the international community in the period between the overthrow of Haiti's first democratically elected President, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, by military forces in September 1991 and his return to power in October 1994.

The report begins by describing how, far from fostering the emergence of consensus, differences of opinion as to the relevance and extent of humanitarian assistance programs (HAPs) in a country like Haiti — extremely poor yet subject to severe economic sanctions — produced deep divisions within both UN agencies and Haitian civil society. Although inter- and intra-agency divisions never completely disappeared, the report explains how PAHO/WHO nonetheless rapidly enrolled certain major actors, including donor agencies, around a structuring approach to humanitarian assistance. Highly aware that, even before the military coup, the country's health situation was in a state of "permanent crisis", those in charge sought to ensure the provision of basic services to the population, while preserving the few achievements of the health network. The study reveals that the strategies adopted to this end — relying on the nonprofit private sector, giving a large role to local resources at all levels of the humanitarian assistance programs in the health sector (Health HAPs), selecting partners on the basis of their technical capabilities, ensuring the smooth functioning of a large coordinating committee — had a paradoxical influence on the Haitian health network. Thus, although all observers agree that these orientations guaranteed the generally smooth operations of the HAPs, they also accentuated pre-existing tensions between the public and private sectors, tensions that became important obstacles to the transition from humanitarian assistance to regular cooperation programs.

The report also explains why, unable to claim impartiality in a country where the United Nations had taken very firm positions, but needing the approval, at least tacit, of the military authorities in order to carry out the HAPs, those responsible for operations adopted a technical approach to humanitarian assistance. Through the Haitian example, the study nevertheless confirms that the boundary between the technical and the political is never completely impermeable. It also demonstrates that, as virtually everyone agrees, the positions adopted — maintaining a «technical» focus, keeping a low public profile, not pursuing persuasive activities — were the only positions that could ensure the continued operation of the Health HAPs. After armed intervention had restored constitutional order, almost all observers recognized that the Health HAPs had prevented both the deterioration of the health situation and the collapse of Haiti's health network. However, serious difficulties of transition rapidly arose to illustrate the requirements of returning to democratic process. Rapidly, what had seemed to be «achievements» dearly won from the crisis were revealed as «obstacles», or «irritants», which made the transition to normalizing the network very difficult. The last section of the report attempts to explain these difficulties by situating them within the general framework of reflections on the process of peace-making and peace-building. In particular, it deals with the implicit prioritization of fundamental rights that structures humanitarian operations, potential contradictions between mechanisms of political peace-making and conditions for social peace-making, as well as the fundamental role of a responsible State in fostering lasting peace.