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We applaud eJewish Philanthropy for its continued coverage of the Jewish response to the 2010 earthquake that devastated Haiti. However, a recent article looking at the country four years after the earthquake ("The Jewish/ Israeli Response to Haiti: A Look at the Landscape Four Years Later") does not paint a full picture of the Jewish response, especially the thinking that animates support of grassroots Haitian efforts to recover and to ensure human rights.

When the earthquake struck Haiti in 2010, the American Jewish community turned to American Jewish World Service (AJWS) with donations totaling more than \$6 million for disaster relief. With these funds we responded immediately by supporting the efforts of local people to aid survivors on the ground. In total, AJWS has supported more than 50 organizations over the past four years, largely grassroots, community-based organizations that are working to rebuild their communities and the country according to their own visions for change. After the earthquake, these local leaders and organizations worked night and day to rescue survivors, distribute food and water, care for the injured and bring life-saving aid to the poorest villages and communities, many of whom had not yet been reached by any other aid organization.

While many individuals and organizations supported the disaster relief efforts of international aid organizations after the earthquake, AJWS focused on grassroots response because we believe that those who are most affected by a problem or challenge are the people who are best able to understand and address it. Listening to these voices is of the utmost importance in our efforts to support social change. We are inspired in this respect by the "Sh'ma" (literally, "Listen!") – one of the central prayers of the Jewish tradition.

Additionally, while many international aid organizations have come and

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gone, AJWS and our Haitian grantees have stayed the course and are providing long-term support to help local communities recover. Because disasters exacerbate existing human rights challenges in developing countries, often worsening conditions for the most vulnerable people, these organizations focus on building more just and equitable societies from the ground up.

For instance, four years after the earthquake, we are still supporting groups that are working to protect the human rights of those most severely affected – such as people who still live in tent camps because the government has yet to build sufficient housing; HIV-positive individuals whose suffering was made worse by having lost their homes; women and LGBT people who continue to face violence and discrimination in the internally displaced persons camps; farmers whose land and crops were destroyed; and Haitians who are battling cholera after the epidemic was introduced into the country through negligent sanitation practices at a United Nations peacekeeping base in 2010.

AJWS also works to promote the rights of Haiti's people by advocating for the United States to support Haiti's recovery. We have fought for policies that ensure transparency and accountability for how U.S. funds are being spent in Haiti, including the recent passage of the Assessing Progress in Haiti Act by the House of Representatives. We lead and host a working group of 30 advocacy organizations that is the principal group of Haiti advocates in Washington today. With these allies, AJWS has helped secure \$2.8 billion of additional relief funding from the United States and cancellation of more than \$700 million of Haiti's debt. In the spring of 2011, AJWS and fellow Haiti activists organized an advocacy week that brought a critical mass of Haitian advocacy organizations to Congress for the very first time, allowing Haitian voices to be heard in the halls of power. Together, our international grantmaking and our domestic advocacy serve to amplify the power of local Haitian voices in the long process of striving for a new Haiti where human rights are respected and realized.

As Haiti continues to rebuild and repair from the earthquake, AJWS remains committed to supporting local leaders and organizations that are contributing to the effort. We invite eJewish Philanthropy to continue covering grassroots and long-term approach to this crucial work.

Ruth Messinger is president of American Jewish World Service (AJWS).

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