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## **Haiti Tragedy Is Avoidable with Enforceable Building Codes**

***Haiti Earthquake Anniversary Statement from  
Richard P. Weiland, ICC Chief Executive Officer***

One year after the horrific impacts of the earthquake in Haiti, we are reminded anew of the consequences of failing to build safe and sustainable communities. In countless ways before and after the Haiti tragedy, communities around the world and in the United States have withstood high fatality, injury, and property damage rates by ensuring that mandatory codes are in place and in force.

Every natural disaster reinforces the message that codes save lives. One look at three magnitude 7.1 earthquakes tells the story: last week's most recent quake in Chile, last year's Haiti quake, and the 1989 *Loma Prieta* quake in the greater San Francisco area. The recent 7.1 earthquake in Chile resulted in minimal damage, while the same magnitude quake in Haiti one year ago resulted in more than 300,000 lives lost, millions displaced and most of Port au Prince's buildings severely damaged or destroyed. In the U.S. the 1989 *Loma Prieta* 7.1 earthquake, with an epicenter that was just south of the densely populated San Francisco bay area, caused 63 deaths and damaged 20,000 structures.

Further, last year a Chilean quake five times more powerful than Haiti's, registering at 8.8, also had a much less severe impact: under a thousand lives were lost and less

than 10 percent of the buildings were damaged or destroyed. Chile, like much of the United States, uses and enforces building codes.

We renew our call for a commitment from the Haitian government, the United Nations, and the donor nations supporting the Haiti recovery effort to seize the opportunity to create a disaster-resistant nation that can serve as a model for others. Today in Haiti overwhelming challenges of addressing basic sheltering, health and environmental needs exist largely due to the failure of substandard structures and infrastructure. Many have organized to address this issue in targeted ways, but without a comprehensive, consistent and enforceable approach on a national level Haiti remains very vulnerable to further avoidable tragedy.

The Code Council remains committed to offering its services and expertise to the establishment of a disaster-resistant Haiti. We will continue our outreach to various organizations tasked with responsibility for recovery operations. We also encourage the various components of the U.S. government including State Department entities such as US AID and the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, along with the Department of Homeland Security/FEMA and the U.S. Department of Defense entities assisting in Haiti, to promote and require compliance with codes applicable to its grants and construction activities.

Study after study indicates that for every dollar spent on reducing risk, the average savings ranges from four to seven dollars. Do we really prefer another mass effort to provide search and rescue, food and shelter, basic medical needs and law enforcement over investment in smart building practices?

We sincerely hope that the next year will result in tangible progress toward a safer and more sustainable Haiti, and an example of how codes are useable and necessary in all corners of the globe. Together with the international community of stakeholders, we have the tools and talent to assist in the building of a safer world.

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