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**News**

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**Spain leads quest to fight child trafficking in Haiti**

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An international humanitarian project led by the Spanish government will provide critical support to Haiti in the wake of the devastating earthquake that has impacted the lives of more than 3.5 million people, officials in Madrid have announced. The aim of the 'DNA-Prokids in Haiti' project is twofold: it will use DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid) testing to help trace the children in a bid to prevent human trafficking, and it will help reunite missing and displaced children with their families.

DNA-Prokids in Haiti will initially take 6,000 samples of genetic data from adults who have reported missing children, from adults who are blood relatives of missing children, and from displaced children in order to deter their trafficking in the confusion after the earthquake.

Before the earthquake there were around 380,000 orphans in Haiti, but the number is now estimated at nearly 1 million. UNICEF (the United Nations Children's Fund) and other humanitarian organisations are warning of the problems of abduction of missing children by child sex traffickers in the chaos after the disaster - a situation that was also widely feared following the 2004 tsunami in the Indian Ocean.

UNICEF executive director Ann M. Veneman said: 'We are extremely concerned about the situation of children in Haiti, many of whom have become separated from their families and caregivers. These children face increased risks of malnutrition and disease, trafficking, sexual exploitation and serious emotional trauma. The race to provide them with life-saving emergency food and medicine, safe shelter, protection, and care is underway.'

DNA-Prokids in Haiti will be developed and coordinated by the Spanish government with the help of the country's University of Granada which has worked with the project since its inception in 2004 from its Laboratory of Genetic Identification. Haitian Ambassador to Madrid Yollete Azor-Charles welcomed the initiative and said that the Haitian government will do everything it can to support the work.

DNA-Prokids in Haiti's work will be carried out in five stages. Commenting on the project, its director, Dr José A Lorente, said: 'This includes on-site training on sample collection; distribution of sample collection kits for saliva and blood for parents (or relatives if needed) who report their children's disappearance; DNA analysis of the cases; design and development of ad hoc databases, and finally data delivery to competent Haitian authorities. Data interchange will make family reunification possible in some cases, it will force a continued search in other cases, but it will save children from abuse and organised crime in all cases.'

DNA-Prokids in Haiti has made contingency plans for other national and international laboratories to help in the data analyses if the University of Granada becomes overwhelmed by the number of cases that will need to be analysed.

The DNA-Prokids in Haiti project was established in 2004 at the University of Granada and was joined in 2009 by the Health Sciences Department of the University of North Texas, US. The project has many financial supporters including the Andalusian regional government in Spain, Spanish financial institutions, and the US-based Life Technologies Foundation. It also collaborates with many other countries to increase its scope including the Guatemala, Mexico, the Philippines, Thailand and the US.

For more information, please visit: