

# Association of Haitian Women in Boston

## Our Mission

AFAB's mission is to empower Haitian women by helping them develop the individual and collective capacity to improve their social, economic and political status and thus effect positive change in their lives and the lives of their families.

[www.afab-kafanm.org](http://www.afab-kafanm.org)

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## Dear Friends,

Thank you for supporting AFAB for the past 20 years. We are indebted to the many contributions our staff members and volunteers have made in our second decade. I must also recognize here the passion and determination of the board of directors of AFAB who kept the organization going strong its first 10 years—and still keep it going.

As social justice agents, the members of AFAB are saddened to observe the impact of the recent and harsh economic crisis on our families in the United States and in Haiti. We will continue to work toward for the eradication of poverty, discrimination, human rights violations, illiteracy, and racism. The severity and complexity of the current challenges require continued reflection and action from all of us in developing effective solutions.

On October 18, 2008, AFAB celebrated 20 years of women's empowerment and honored Massachusetts State Representative Linda Dorcena-Forry and AFAB program participant and volunteer Paulette Jean-Baptiste for their contributions to our work in greater Boston. We also reiterated that tough economic times demand that we all come together as a community. It is the community spirit that will keep us strong as individuals, families, and organizations. Let's keep hope and justice alive.

In this newsletter, we report on a special dialogue with Lieutenant Governor Tim Murray on October 22, 2008. We also review the work of two focus groups—one conducted with Haitian men and another with Haitian women—on domestic violence. Finally, we report on the New England Haiti Relief Effort for victims of Haiti's recent hurricanes.

Wishing you safe and peaceful holidays,

Carline Desiré  
Executive Director

## DIALOGUE WITH MASSACHUSETTS LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR TIM MURRAY



*Lieutenant Governor signs Declaration of Domestic Violence*

On October 22, 2008, the Haitian Roundtable on Domestic Violence met with Lieutenant Governor, Tim Murray; State Representatives Linda Dorcena-Forry and Willie Mae Allen; as well as several other key community leaders in an important move to declare Domestic Violence as being in a state of emergency in the Haitian community of the City of Boston. This Declaration was especially timely, coming in October, which has been recognized as Domestic Violence Awareness month.

Several domestic violence concerns were expressed at the round table discussion with more than 20 leaders from community organizations statewide. The biggest concern was the severe relapse in funding for service providers to the immigrant victims of domestic violence. This issue prompted promising remarks from the Lieutenant Governor who informed Haitian Roundtable members that the Governor's office was not only aware of the problem and its severity but had actively begun to discuss solutions to it and will continue to make steps towards improving conditions for victims seeking assistance in the coming months.



Paulette Jean-Baptiste, Awardee

**AFAB Annual Fundraiser celebrates 20 years of women’s empowerment**

AFAB’s 2008 fundraiser honored Massachusetts State Representative Linda Dorcena-Forry, and AFAB program participant and volunteer Paulette Jean-Baptiste for their contributions to AFAB’s mission to serve Haitian women and families in greater Boston. The event’s welcoming remarks were made by Rosette Joseph, and opening remarks made by M. Andre Pierre Victor. Special musical guests included Panama Cultural and Zili Mizik. Closing remarks were made by Carline Desire, and photography by DPM Productions. See photos left.

**DECLARATION of The Haitian Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Roundtable**

**WE**, the concerned citizens of Massachusetts, **DECLARE**

Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault affect all aspects of the Haitian community, as well, all aspects of all other communities;

Given the current level of violence within the community, it is urgent that Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault be addressed within the Haitian community;

This *state of urgency* within the community has, also, in part, been caused by the failure of us all to recognize and address Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault;

The risks and consequences caused by this community failure to recognize and address Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault are born by everyone—victims, abusers, the community and community leaders.

It is crucial to provide a united presence on domestic violence and sexual assault for Haitian women, men and the community at large;

In an effort to collectively raise awareness to this alarming situation in the Haitian community,

We, the members of the Haitian Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Roundtable, acknowledge the terms of this declaration and commit to making a significant change in our life and the lives of others.

*Association of Haitian Women of Boston (AFAB), Boston Area Rape Crisis Center (BARCC), Department of Children and Families (DCF), Haitian American Public Health Initiatives (HAPHI), Haitian Multi Service Center (HMSC), Massachusetts Community Health Services (MCHS), Suffolk County District Attorney, Family Justice Center (FJC), Boston Police Department, Safe Haven, Greater Boston Legal Services (GBLS), Boston Medical Center (SISTA), Codman Square Health Center.*

**We ask YOU to stand beside us!**



Ayiti Demen group and their adult leader, Yola Dubois (far right) and youth leader, Sole Nazaire (far left)



Massachusetts State Rep. Linda Dorcena-Forry

## Calendar of Events

- **Live Show on Tele Kreyol**  
Tuesday, November 25 at 8:00pm  
Tele Kreyol, Channel 23 (BNN)
- **Year-End Party**  
Saturday, December 27, at 7:00pm  
KAFANM, 330 Fuller Street
- **Ancestor Day Dinner**  
Friday, January 2, 2009 at 6:00pm  
KAFANM, 330 Fuller Street
- **Ayiti Demen & French classes start**  
Saturday, January 17, 2009  
KAFANM, 330 Fuller Street
- **ESL and Literacy classes start**  
Tuesday, January 20, 2009  
KAFANM, 330 Fuller Street
- **International Women's Day Event**  
Saturday, March 7, 2009 at 9:00am  
Great Hall, Codman Square
- **Haitian Mother's Day Celebration**  
Sunday, May 31, 2009  
Details To Be Announced
- **Annual Clergy Breakfast**  
Saturday, June 13, 2009 at 9:00am,  
Great Hall, Codman Square
- **Annual Domestic Violence Forum**  
Saturday, August 8, 2009 at 9:00am  
Great Hall, Codman Square

For more information regarding the Domestic Violence program, please contact:

**Carmelle Bonhomère,**

Program Director:

(617) 287-0096

[cbonhomere@afab-kafanm.org](mailto:cbonhomere@afab-kafanm.org)

**Myrdell Belizaire**

Civil Legal Advocate:

Wednesday-Thursday

(617) 288-9500 Ext: 251

Tuesday

(617) 779-2151

[mbelizaire@afab-kafanm.org](mailto:mbelizaire@afab-kafanm.org)

## REPORT ON AFAB FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

AFAB hosted two focus groups this summer in which community members shared opinions on the causes and possible resolutions to domestic violence. The men's focus group took place on Haitian Father's Day (June) and the women's took place a week later.

The men reflected on their beliefs of what constitutes domestic violence and how it is instigated. Although the group consisted of Haitian men, this group should not serve as representative of all Haitian men. According to the comments and responses from focus group participants, both verbal and physical abuse are, indeed, seen as violence. A number of the participants felt that in order to be viewed as an authoritative figures, using violence was a way to show one has control "kontwòl". The men expressed several precipitating factors to their episodes of violence, such as immigration and financial issues, preparing for their families, insecurity issues, stresses of daily life and cultural issues.

There were several problems identified within this group. Some participants found it difficult to understand domestic violence as violence per se, when they already saw it as a normal occurrence in family life. Furthermore, some participants felt that it is understood within the Haitian culture that men have the right to a higher social position than women, as well as the power in a relationship, which they feel gives them the authority to be violent. Some participants felt that it was also common in the Haitian culture for individuals to confuse violence as an expression of love, which further kept them from viewing or recognizing it as a problem. The men ended by making some suggestions on ways to prevent domestic violence including having more educational programs directed at young adults and men (especially regarding child support). They also felt that Haitians in Boston should also be educated on the possible legal consequences that could result from domestic violence, specifically in relation to immigration status. Finally, a need was expressed for more campaigns to be broadcast on the radio and television, along with structured dialogues or panels among men in the community in order to build more male social networks.

The women's focus group saw things a little differently. Through their experiences, they realized that verbal abuse and physical abuse are often tied. They noted that oftentimes, verbal abuse turns into physical abuse and physical abuse is often accompanied by verbal abuse. The women also recognized the connections between violence and sexual activity, specifically that sex usually follows violence, jealousy instigates violence, and violence is sometimes used to force sex or sexual acts. They felt that a misunderstanding of the meaning of marriage and love as interchangeable complicates domestic violence. Furthermore, they expressed that women who feel insecure about their immigrant status often sustain and tolerate domestic violence in their homes. Many of the women realized how many batterers would express regret for their acts of violence but would refuse to change their ways. This was seen as the irreversibility of a "bad" man or *anjandre*.

In making diagnoses on domestic violence issues, the women voiced their fears of losing child custody, and being undocumented. The men would explicitly exploit them on those bases.

## AFAB WISH LIST

Computer  
Computer software  
Monitor  
Printer

## VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

Intern  
Office Support  
ESL Instructors  
Program Evaluator

The women mentioned stereotypes they must battle, and the police and the judicial system assuming that they are being dishonest. The women voiced the lack of emergency or immediate solutions as well as long-term solutions to their situations.

They discussed how the legal protection of the children precludes the rights of the abused, so if two parents are involved, then the battered victim is not allowed to flee immediately with their child. Many of the women named obstacles to working with police, such as the language barriers. Finally, they looked at how women must deal with compounding pressures from relatives, especially in-laws, to deal with the problem of domestic violence.

As with the men did, the women made a number suggestions as to how domestic violence could be stopped or greatly reduced in the Haitian community of Boston. Weekly radio programs in both Haitian Creole and English going out to general and Haitian-specific stations. The building of more social networks for women, especially victims of AIDS, domestic violence, and instruction on different ways to approach abusers and/or the criminal justice system would be helpful. The women stressed the importance of promoting awareness of AFAB, articulating its social benefits as well as its value to the community.

In closing, there is still much work to be done to understand the roots of domestic violence in the Haitian population, in general, and in Boston. The focus groups have highlighted the importance of not only educational programs for youth and adults, but also the vital purposes served by social support networks.

## THE NEW ENGLAND-HAITI RELIEF TASK FORCE

AFAB joined several organizations and individuals to launch the New England Haiti Relief Task Force to respond to the dire needs of victims of Haiti's hurricanes in the summer and fall of 2008. The New England Haiti Relief Task Force collected monetary donations that amounted to \$18,500 and other donations to include clothes, hygienic and medical supplies as well as school supplies. The Task Force partnered with Fonkoze to provide cash assistance to victims, and we sent a 40-foot metal container to Haiti.

On Sunday, September 21, the Task Force organized a major fundraising event and collected a great number of supplies including school supplies, food, clothes, and water. The Haitian community in Boston along with individuals from all over New England made great contributions.

AFAB continued collecting and receiving donations on almost a daily basis until the third week of November. It is great to see not only Haitians in Boston reaching out to their compatriots back home, but also Americans and other nationals doing their part to help out as well.

AFAB plans to have a few more fundraising events, providing further opportunities for those who have not yet donated to do so. Members of the task force plan to meet in order to ensure that the goods get to the proper recipients. Our condolences go out to grieving families.

## AFAB-KAFANM SERVICES

**HOUSING AND HOUSING ADVOCACY:** KAFANM provides six housing units and a community center. AFAB assists newly arrived Haitian immigrants in applying for public housing benefits and facilitates workshops on housing issues such as tenant rights, home buying, etc.

**ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAMS:** Our adult education programs provide individuals with the fundamental skills necessary to secure gainful employment and to better integrate themselves into society.

**YOUTH DEVELOPMENT:** Our youth programs enrich the lives of our students through the delivery of solid academic and social skills. They prepare students to face life's challenges and bridge generational and cultural gaps within the Haitian community.

**DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PREVENTION:** AFAB affirms the right of abused women to be safe and to prosecute their offenders when necessary. A cornerstone of our mission, the domestic violence prevention program provides essential support to domestic violence survivors and their families while they attempt to regain control of their lives. The Haitian Round Table on Domestic Violence meets every first Wednesday of the month with different providers joining forces in the fight against domestic violence.

**COMMUNITY OUTREACH:** Outreach: The outreach program focuses on a large number of individuals who normally don't participate in community events. Legal Services Project: Our pilot legal project provides advocacy clinics on general legal immigration issues and seeks to establish a pro-bono panel of lawyers in the Haitian community.