

"Haiti Prime Minister Declares Haiti is Open for International Business"

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13 October - The United Nations Security Council voted unanimously Tuesday to extend the UN peacekeeping mission in Haiti for a year, saying the situation in the impoverished Caribbean nation still constitutes a threat to international peace and security despite recent progress. The resolution adopted by the council will maintain the current mission's force level of about 9,000 troops and police. (AP)

1 October - Declaring Haiti "open for business," Prime Minister Michele Pierre-Louis welcomed hundreds of potential investors on Thursday to a conference meant to kick-start an economy stunted by decades of political turmoil. The organizer, the Inter-American Development Bank, hopes the star power of former US President Bill Clinton can lure new business to the poorest country in the Americas, where 70 percent of the population lives on less than US\$2 a day.

Local officials said the meeting was the largest investment conference ever held in Haiti and had attracted US apparel heavyweights like Gap, American Eagle Outfitters and Levi Strauss, and a host of Latin American textile firms. International banks including Canada's Scotiabank and US giant CITI had representatives on hand to discuss loans.

"Haiti is open for business," Pierre-Louis told a crowded convention hall in French and English. "At the government, we are doing our share. Now we turn to you and ask you to do yours," she said, adding, "Time is of the essence."

The conference was largely focused on agriculture and textiles and began on the day Haiti's new minimum wages kicked in. Approved by the legislature last month, the minimum for textile workers rises from 70 gourdes, about US\$1.75, to 125 gourdes, or US\$3.10, per day. For most other workers, the minimum rises from 70 to 200 gourdes, or about US\$5.00 a day.

Georges Sassine, president of Haiti's Industrial Association, said there was "tremendous" interest in low-cost Haiti from Latin American garment companies. He toured northern areas with a dozen business people this week. "They are looking at setting up textile mills and factories," he said. Haiti's garment manufacturing industry, which employed some 130,000 people in the 1980s but shriveled to only a few thousand in recent years, has been reinvigorated by the passage in Washington last year of the Haitian Hemispheric Opportunity through Partnership Encouragement (HOPE II) Act. (Reuters)