

Ottawa rejects call for special Haiti envoy

U.S. channels will benefit: think tank

BY JULIET O'NEILL, CANWEST NEWS SERVICE FEBRUARY 21, 2010

The federal government has rejected a call to appoint a former prime minister as a Canadian "champion" for Haiti - deciding not to follow in the footsteps of U.S. President Barack Obama, who drafted Bill Clinton and George W. Bush to spearhead American support for earthquake-relief efforts.

Carlo Dade, executive director of FOCAL, has been urging Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper to "reach across partisan lines" to appoint a former Liberal prime minister Jean Chrétien or Paul Martin, or former Progressive Conservative prime minister Brian Mulroney as a special envoy to bolster government efforts on Haiti with a private-sector campaign.

A Foreign Affairs Department spokesman ruled out the proposal yesterday, though, saying the door is not open to appointment of an envoy.

"No, it is a government of Canada initiative of the prime minister of Canada, supported by minister Cannon and minister Oda," spokesman Catherine Loubier said, referring to Foreign Affairs Minister Lawrence Cannon and International Cooperation Minister Bev Oda.

FOCAL is the Canadian Foundation for the Americas, an Ottawa-based think tank dedicated to strengthening Canadian ties with Latin America and the Caribbean.

Canada needs a person of stature who has the connections to harness corporate-sector funds for Haiti and to establish public-private partnerships to help in what is expected to be a complex but doable, multibillion-dollar rebuilding effort in Haiti, Dade said recently.

He predicted that without such a champion and a Canadian channel for corporate philanthropy and investment, interested companies will operate through U.S. channels, such as the Clinton-Bush initiative.

Dade says needs in Haiti are so great that the federal government needs to expand its "all-of-government approach" to an "all-of-Canada approach."