

# BWH Bulletin

*For and about the People of Brigham and Women's Hospital*

## **Damon, Farmer Advocate for Change Haiti Can Believe In**

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Paul Farmer and Matt Damon participate in a panel discussion on change in Haiti at the Kennedy Library.

When actor and activist Matt Damon arrived in Haiti 12 days after a fourth hurricane struck the island last fall, people were still trapped on their rooftops, starving to death and in desperate need of medical care.

“It was like a disaster on top of another disaster,” Damon said, referencing the hurricanes combined with the abject poverty in which many Haitians live.

The actor, who called attention to the crisis by visiting the flood-ravaged city of Gonaives with Haitian native Wyclef Jean, described the conditions as “inhuman.”

Last week, Damon joined Paul Farmer, MD, PhD, Partners In Health co-founder and associate chief of BWH’s Division of Global Health Equity, Linda Dorcena Forry, state representative from Dorchester, and Brian Concannon, Jr., director of the Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti, for a panel discussion at the Kennedy Library on the reasons for Haiti’s circumstances and how the U.S. government and individuals can help the country rebuild itself.

Farmer, who first visited Haiti at age 23, spoke about the work of Partners In Health to provide health care and train Haitians to become community health workers. To help the country succeed, PIH expands only in the public sector, building its clinics and hospitals on land owned by the Ministry of Health.

“We’re trying to continue that model of rebuilding public infrastructure, taking care of sick people and preventing illness, but also training people and ensuring that land is owned by the people of Haiti,” Farmer said. “We believe that is how it will be sustained—because it’s owned lock, stock and barrel, every bit of it, by the Haitian republic.”

During the packed “Change Haiti Can Believe In” forum, panelists decried apathy, urging the U.S. Government, non-governmental organizations and individuals to support efforts to help Haiti transform into a stronger country.

“We need more than donors; we need supporters,” Farmer said. “People need to be aware of Haiti and ensure that good works are supported.”

Dorcena Forry, whose parents came to the U.S. from Haiti in the 1960s, called upon President Barack Obama and others to acknowledge the importance of Haiti. “We have the opportunity to do so much for this little island 600 miles from our shores,” she said.

The forum drew hundreds to the Kennedy Library, and thousands more tuned in to a webcast. View the webcast now, and learn how you can help, at [www.pih.org](http://www.pih.org)