Haiti set to recover plundered Duvalier assets from Switzerland with UN help

13 February 2009 – Haiti is on the way to recovering $6 million of assets allegedly plundered by former President Jean-Claude Duvalier and stashed in Switzerland thanks to an initiative backed by the United Nations.

This is an important step in helping restitute the funds to the people of Haiti, World Bank Managing Director Ngozi N. Okonjo-Iweala said today in a statement welcoming the Swiss order for the return of the assets. Asset recovery can be a complicated and time-consuming process.

The joint efforts by the governments of Haiti and Switzerland, supported by the World Bank and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Stolen Recovery Asset Initiative, have demonstrated that developed and developing countries can work together to fight corruption and end impunity for those that steal from the poor. Haiti’s success should encourage the victims of corruption to launch asset recovery programmes, she added.

The Swiss Federal Office of Justice ruling on the Duvalier assets was issued after the account holders failed to prove to the court that the funds were legitimately acquired. Account holders still have 30 days to appeal the decision. Ms. Okonjo-Iweala commended the cooperation and commitment of both governments to the fight against corruption.

At the request of the government of Haiti, the joint World Bank-UNODC Stolen Asset Recovery Initiative (StAR) provided technical and diplomatic assistance to facilitate the resolution of the case.

The StAR Initiative was launched in 2007 by Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, World Bank President Robert B. Zoellick, and UNODC Executive Director Antonio Maria Costa. It emphasizes that developed and developing countries share a joint responsibility in tackling corruption, and that international collaboration and collective action are needed to facilitate asset recovery and prevent asset theft.