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Wyclef launches new initiative to help Haiti

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By Joseph Guyler Delva

NEW YORK, May 20 (Reuters) - Haitian-born hip-hop star Wyclef Jean launched a new initiative to help his impoverished homeland on Tuesday following last month's deadly food riots.

The initiative is aimed at raising \$48 million over the next six months to fund expanded food distribution, job creation and assistance for farmers in the poorest country in the Americas.

Dubbed "Together For Haiti" it is backed by the World Food Program, the Pan American Development Foundation and Yele Haiti, Jean's charitable foundation for Haiti.

"We have come together to launch this new initiative because I believe we can do more and better for Haiti when we act together," Jean told a Manhattan news conference.

"We are not only interested in feeding people in response to the current crisis, but we want to offer them an alternative that can help them in a sustainable way," he said.

"Together For Haiti" plans to employ 1,800 people a day in poor areas, distribute food to 1.5 million people and provide fertilizers to 55,000 farmers. Grants will also be given to 9,000 families to support the development of micro-enterprises.

"We want to give them the opportunity to set up a small business which they can live on instead of assisting them every time there is a crisis," Jean told Reuters.

He was accompanied at the news conference by aid officials and by fellow musician and social activist Paul Simon, who promised support.

At least six people were killed during a week of violent protests last month against rising food and fuel costs in Haiti, where most people scrape by on less than \$2 per day. (Editing by Tom Brown and Alan Elsner)

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