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## **Time Running Out for Haiti**

*Haitian Activist Lucie Tondreau Offers a Closer Look at the Devastation and Pleads for Decisive and Sustained Action from the Caribbean Diaspora*

**January 25, 2010:** Over 150,000 bodies have already been recovered in the wake of the cataclysmic earthquake in Haiti, but that number could reach as high as one million people without decisive and prolonged intervention from the Caribbean community. This was the chilling conclusion reached by Lucie Tondreau, Haitian activist based in Miami. She made the statement while addressing the media at a press conference organized by the Emancipation Support Committee (ESC) at the organization's headquarters in Maraval.

The press conference was held in order to give the public a clearer picture of the situation in Haiti and to outline the ESC's plans to help that devastated country. Ms. Tondreau who has been actively assisting the Haitian community since 1981, and who has already mobilized over 200 doctors and nurses from across the United States to treat wounded Haitians, urged the Caribbean to move quickly and strategically to help the people of Haiti. "The need is great, not only for immediate aid, but also for the long term," she stated. "What will happen to Haiti, once the lights and cameras are turned off and the media is gone? People need to be reminded that what has happened in Haiti cannot be fixed overnight, but will need extensive and prolonged action," she said.

### **Death and Destruction**

Painting truly a grim picture of the situation, Ms Tondreau explained to reporters that while the focus has been on Port-au-Prince, many outlying areas, including the settlements near the epicentre that were even more heavily damaged remain neglected. People in those areas have been starving - with even those who have money unable to find food and water, and many more remaining buried under the rubble. She described frantic phone calls from survivors crying out for help for their relatives who are alive, but buried under the rubble. "I don't know what to tell them," she shared, frustration evident in her voice. "The likelihood is that many thousands more people will die, not from the earthquake, but from the aftermath - those who are still alive but buried and beyond the help of their families and those who need urgent medical care but will not receive it in time."

Thanking those who have already reached out to help her homeland, Ms. Tondreau urged a greater response particularly in the area of medical assistance. "The people of Haiti are in shock," she said. "Many have lost loved ones or neighbours, or know someone who has lost a loved one." She revealed that in her own community in Miami, one mother lost all five of her children. That mother had been in the process of completing the lengthy process to bring her children to Miami to be with her, but it was now too late. Ms. Tondreau spoke of the loss of her own cousin, crushed beyond recognition when the school he was teaching in



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collapsed. "The people of Haiti," she said "need urgent psychological intervention to deal with the trauma of this catastrophic event."

Ms. Tondreau described the dire situation facing youth. Young people who should be in school are now roaming the capital without a school to attend and without teachers – many teachers, professors and students had been killed. One school in the outlying region saw all 1800 students perish in the quake. She urged the Caribbean community to take in and help some of those students – particularly those in the final years of secondary school, University and medical school – to finish their studies. "These are the ones who will be very instrumental in rebuilding Haitian society in the future," she said.

Ms. Tondreau also sought to dispel some of the misinformation that has been spread by the foreign media about the state of the country. "Haiti is not cursed," she stated "and African religions that are being condemned as evil by those who are misinformed, but remember that people of *all* faiths were hurt by this disaster." She continued: "Haiti has not descended into violence and anarchy as some media reports would have us believe. In fact, the United Nations has commended the people for remaining as calm as they have been. There have been pockets of unrest, yes, but that is to be expected. But for the most part, Haiti has been quite stable especially considering the magnitude of the disaster and the fact that the situation remains grim for millions of people."

### **Hope Despite Incalculable Losses**

Yet beyond the devastation, the resilience of the Haitian people shines through. Ms. Tondreau was high in praise for Haitians who have shown strength and courage in the face of extensive damage and desolation. Many people have lost everything they own, government buildings housing important records have been completely destroyed and most families will never be able to account for their dead – no funerals will be held and most will never find out what has happened to their loved ones, since many of the dead have had to be unceremoniously dumped into mass graves. People will have great difficulty rebuilding their lives because of the tremendous loss of property.

"The Haitian people have been through difficulties before and they have survived, and I have no doubt that they will survive this, but we need our Caribbean neighbours to help with doctors, particularly psychologists and we need your assistance with education and reconstruction." Ms Tondreau stated. "We do not have the luxury of time. We need to build homes for the millions who have been displaced and who are sleeping on the streets and under makeshift tents. It will take many years for Haiti to recover, but we are confident that with your help we can do so," she concluded.

### **Emancipation Support Committee Steps in to Assist Haiti**

Khafra Kambon, Chairman of the ESC outlined his organization's plan to assist the people of Haiti and he urged the people of Trinidad to give their full support. "Haiti is a centrepiece of



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African liberation, pride and struggle and we owe them a debt of gratitude for our freedom," he stated. "It is our duty to commit ourselves to standing by them long after the media spotlight is gone." To that end, the ESC outlined a number of steps to ensure the long-term reconstruction and development of Haiti:

- a) Establishment of the Haiti Development Fund. This fund will remain open for the long-term and all monies collected will be used for the development of agriculture, reforestation and education. An account has been opened at Republic Bank (#180 482 611 901) and the public is urged to assist by making deposits to this fund.
- b) Establishment of a Caribbean Scholarship Programme. The ESC urges governments of the Caribbean to assist with this programme by opening their borders to help Haitian students continue their education. The ESC will work with civic organizations both within Haiti and the Diaspora community to match students in need to homes and schools willing to assist. The ESC will also assist in mobilizing technical skills that the country will need.
- c) Advocacy campaign: To dispel the myths and help the public to better understand the people of Haiti and their history, the ESC will work to correct misconceptions and promote greater cooperation between Haiti and Trinidad and Tobago.

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