

Emancipation Support Committee

Launch of Fund for the Reconstruction and Development of Haiti

Background

On Tuesday 12 January a 7.0 Earthquake struck Haiti in close proximity to its capital Port-au-Prince, which is host to almost a third of Haiti's population. In the aftermath of the disaster it has been estimated that some 3 million people have been affected, 1.5 million are homeless, with a death toll that may reach anywhere between 100,000 and 250,000. Official reports say that over 75,000 bodies have been buried in mass graves. There are no counts on those buried by friends and relatives or the bodies left in the rubble, and no body counts in areas not yet reached by relief efforts. It should be noted that the estimated death toll following the Asian Tsunami of 2004, was 250,000, a figure which the World Health Organization called "unprecedented in recorded History".

The extent of the catastrophe in Haiti however goes far beyond what is conveyed by the horrendous death toll, the number of persons homeless and other such staggering statistics. The virtual wipe out of the capital of Haiti has severely damaged the country's institutional infrastructure by destroying not only most of the buildings critical to administration, education, health, other essential services and business, but by eliminating vital human capital, and burying in the rubble stored information essential to the operation of the society, an incalculable proportion of which may forever be lost. Effective government, business, communications, national and international agency services and capacities all essentially collapsed within seconds along with the buildings and infrastructure.

Amidst the ruins, and the unfathomable individual and collective grief, countless families, the very bedrock institution of any society, now remain broken and bereaved, further stressing the functional capability of the society.

With the combined impact of such near total breakdown of a functioning society and the escalation of medical emergencies, homelessness, hunger, thirst and threats of major epidemics, massive international efforts to supply basic needs will be essential for a long time. In light of the emergency needs, the Emancipation Support Committee renews its public encouragement to citizens to continue their generous support to reliable funds for the relief efforts in Haiti. Apart from the public call we made after the disastrous earthquake, we have been directing the many persons who have contacted us to channel support through the Media Net Haiti Relief Fund.

As much as the relief is important, we also have to direct our thoughts at the reconstruction effort in small ways and in big. Haiti's fate as a viable nation now lies in the balance. The capacity, will and determination of Haitians to drive their own development is not in question. The history has many demonstrations of that indomitable will and capability of Haitians to shape their own destiny. The finest examples were shown in the revolution and the immediate post revolutionary period when a society had to be reconstructed out of physical ruins that were proportionately larger than the destruction of the earthquake. The Citadel built atop the mountain (Cap Haitien), by Africans who had just freed themselves from slavery, as the core of the country's military defense, has often been described in awe as the eighth wonder of the world.

At every period in history where the people have been able to carve out some breathing space politically, the last being the brief periods of Aristide's government, we have seen progress against great odds and obstacles.

Once more Haitians are called upon to make a superhuman effort for recovery, reconstruction and development. The will and spirit seen in the small miracles of survivors, including the very old, pulled smiling from the ruins long after logic would have killed hope, the courage with which Haitians, including the wounded, combined their efforts to rescue fellow citizens from the rubble with their bare hands, the calm and fortitude with which they faced their fate, all tell us of their preparedness to surmount the challenges of reconstruction. We have a sacred duty to them, to ourselves and to all of humanity, to do all that we can to help the Haitian people to raise the new civilization they deserve out of the ruins.

This recognition, combined with a deep historical and emotional commitment to the people to whom we owe our freedom, compels us to do all that we can to work with Haitians to rise again. Strategically we have placed our emphasis on the reconstruction and development efforts. We know that when the cameras leave Port Au Prince and the inevitable pledges of massive aid, which will emerge from international conferences, remain unfulfilled, the Haitians will be left with fewer friends and scarce material resources to pull their lives together again.

But even the scarcity of resources and friends will not be the major obstacle to Haiti's development. That will come from the interference of powerful countries and interests. Just as the military (in the name of security, for whom?) far outweighed the humanitarian in the initial US response on the ground, considerations that are not directed at the well being or developmental goals of Haitians will certainly dominate the reconstruction effort if those countries which have the most capacity in terms of material resources are able to determine the quality and direction of Haiti's reconstruction.

We cannot forget for a moment that the relationship of many of these countries to Haiti for two centuries, and continuing unabated into the 21st Century has been one of implacable hatred. The history has been one of embargo, extortion, political destabilization, military invasion, economic exploitation and strangulation and a relentless assault on the character of the people.

This is not cause for despair but a reason for determination. We have to make our best effort to raise funds that will be needed to help the efforts of grassroots organizations in Haiti to rebuild and embark on long term sustainable development projects, to help wider regional efforts at governmental and non-governmental levels that can support larger Caribbean interventions in partnership with Haitians. We have to strengthen the recognition that Caribbean people have a special role to play in ensuring the independence and development of our neighbour. That involves changing the international political climate within which Haiti operates, spearheading the mobilization of the wider African Diaspora community, securing the cooperation of African countries, and identifying partners throughout the international community who have the decency to stand against exploitative designs on a prostrate country.

ESC PROPOSED ACTIONS

Against this background, the ESC, after consultations with its Haitian partners announces the following:

1. We have established a Haiti Reconstruction and Development Fund to which we invite members of the public to contribute generously.
2. We are proposing that Caribbean governments to set up a CARICOM Community scholarship programme for Haitian young women and men to strengthen redevelopment skills in areas such as:
 - a. Construction
 - b. Health
 - c. Early Childhood Education
 - d. Agriculture
3. Along with our Caribbean partners we will help in mobilizing technical skills throughout the region to help Haitians in their development thrusts
4. Our organization and its Caribbean partners will be embarking on an advocacy campaign which supports initiatives that strengthen a positive enabling environment in which Haiti can chart its own path of development