

## Haiti One Year After the Quake

# The Rubble—and U.S. Imperialism—Remain



**2010** January—Port-au-Prince.

It is one year after a huge earthquake hit Haiti: Over a million people—including 300,000 children—are still homeless, mostly living in huge squalid camps with little access to food, clean water, sanitation or medical care. A cholera epidemic—the first in Haiti in 100 years—has killed 3,000 people, and 140,000 are sick with the disease. The capital of Port-au-Prince remains a city of rubble. Except for the main airport, no infrastructure has been rebuilt. Bodies are still being uncovered. Only 10 to 20 percent of reconstruction aid pledged by the international community has been received.

### 1. Powerful Quake Hits Impoverished Haiti

On January 12, 2010, a major earthquake devastated Haiti. Over 200,000 people died, 300,000 were injured and 1.5 million were left homeless. The quake was powerful, but the death and destruction was greatly increased by the impoverished conditions resulting from 100 years of U.S. domination. U.S. policy in the '70s and '80s consciously destroyed much of Haitian agriculture, driving millions of displaced peasants into the cities seeking jobs. Port-au-Prince grew from 257,000 in 1960 to three million at the time of the quake, with many people packed in shacks that blanketed steep hillsides and deep ravines, totally vulnerable to the quake's devastation. Corrupt, U.S.-imposed governments had never bothered with such things as earthquake preparation or building codes. And Port-au-Prince was a city with little infrastructure, heavy equipment, or health-care, making rescue efforts vastly more difficult.

### 2. The World Responds, U.S. Sabotages Aid

Millions of people, in Haiti and around the world, responded in one of the largest humanitarian outpourings in history. *Half* the people in the U.S. made donations to relief aid (CNN). Many people dropped everything and went to Haiti to help. But for the U.S. government, the priority was ensuring *political and military control*. 22,000 U.S. troops seized the airport and *prevented* aid from coming in. Food and medicine piled up in warehouses and on tarmacs while people suffered and died. All aid flights had to be approved by the U.S., and the little food distributed by the U.S. came with an intimidating show of military force—dropped from helicopters to hungry crowds below, or passed out by squads of heavily armed soldiers.

### 3. The Rules of the Game

U.S. imperialism operates—and can only operate—according to certain *rules*. When a U.S. company goes into Haiti, it's to make profits. When the U.S. sends in troops, it's to dominate Haiti and protect its larger regional interests. When the U.S. sends aid, it's done to advance U.S. economic interests and to achieve certain political and strategic goals. Everything the U.S. does in a country it dominates is to reinforce relations of exploitation and the political and social relations that serve that. These are the rules of the game.

### 4. History of U.S. Domination

When Haitian slaves rose up, drove out the French and abolished slavery in 1804, the U.S.—fearing the rebellion would spread to its own slaves—*punished* Haiti, refused to recognize it and placed the newborn island nation under a trade embargo. U.S. Marines invaded and occupied Haiti from 1915 until 1934. The U.S. seized land and distributed it to American corporations. Heroic resistance against the U.S. was brutally crushed. Starting in 1957 the U.S. propped up the pro-U.S. dictatorial Duvalier governments—first Papa Doc and then Baby Doc—and the murderous Haitian military, along with the Tonton Macoute gangs that terrorized the people. After popular uprisings ousted these dictators the U.S. maneuvered and intervened—opposing any forces that threatened U.S. interests. In 2004, the U.S. was directly involved in overthrowing the popularly elected president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

Referring to the U.S. role in Haiti, Bill Quigley, Legal Director for the Center for Constitutional Rights, said: "We have kept the country dependent. We have kept the country militarized. And we kept the country impoverished. We have dumped our excess rice, our excess farm produce and that stuff on the country, thereby undercutting the small farmers who would make up the backbone of the place... We didn't create the earthquake, but we created some of the circumstances that made the earthquake so devastating..." (*Democracy Now!*, January 14, 2010)

### 5. Aid and Capitalist Relations

Most of the billion dollars in aid pledged by Obama has not been delivered. But even the "aid" that has been delivered serves, and can only serve to increase U.S. domination. Sociologist Alex Dupuy of Wesleyan University writes: "[O]f the more than 1,500 U.S. contracts doled out worth \$267 million, only 20, worth \$4.3 million, have gone to Haitian firms. The rest have gone to U.S. firms, which almost exclusively use U.S. suppliers... the bulk of the money and profits are reinvested in the United States." And for U.S. imperialism Haiti's poverty and desperation are an *asset* in "reconstruction" geared toward making Haiti a haven for cheap labor sweatshops.

At the same time, the same capitalist rules of ownership and profit that guide these dreams present roadblocks to reconstruction. The *New York Times* wrote: "[D]ebris... also has a



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potential monetary value if it is to be reused. 'It's not just the rubble, it's the question of rubble ownership,' Mr. Scales [of the International Organization for Migration] said. Most [people on the land to be cleared] are renters, but the rubble technically belongs to the property owners. And sorting out who owns what land, and getting their permission to excavate has proved difficult. (July 10, 2010) "Rubble ownership" is being sorted out in the midst of massive human suffering.

### 6. Bitter Truth and the Potential of the People

The efforts of the Haitian people to rebuild their country, and the generosity of millions around the world, has been utterly squandered by a system that puts power and profit before the lives of the people.

Amidst the rubble and continuing misery, there have been stories of tremendous resilience, courage, and generosity among



January 2011. Woman with cholera being transported in wheelbarrow to hospital in Cite Soleil.

the Haitian people. This has been very inspiring and here we can see great potential. In a Haiti free from the grip of imperialist domination and the capitalist system, with a *revolutionary* government, this tremendous potential of the people could be brought forward as a powerful force for not only overcoming conditions of poverty but building a whole new society free of exploitation.

Go to revcom.us for more coverage and analysis of what happened when the earthquake hit, what the U.S. did in response, and the whole history of U.S. domination in Haiti.



1994. One of the many U.S. invasions and occupations of Haiti.