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LADB Staff

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## Haiti Pays for World's Concern

by LADB Staff

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Hurricane Jeanne may have provided a disappointing answer to the question, "What is it going to take to get Haiti the sustained support it needs to build a country out of chaos?"

In the aftermath of the storm that proved devastation could always get worse, help has come in a variety of forms. Before the storm, peacekeeping forces had complained their numbers were insufficient, their funding too paltry, and their support from the interim government too ephemeral to bring order to Haiti and set a foundation for its re-emergence as a functioning country. After a week studded with uncertain but rising death tolls, looting, panicky assaults on food supplies, incipient epidemic disease from rotting corpses, waterborne filth, and exposure to rain and contagion on crowded rooftops, the UN is sending more troops.

Gen. Augusto Heleno Ribeiro Periera, head of the peacekeeping force, guessed the number of dead at a minimum of 1,500, the number of homeless at 200,000 in Gonaives alone. He called the situation critical. He spoke of diarrhea and gangrene, of lacerations from zinc roofing hidden in mud, of amputations performed under horrendous conditions.

Anne Poulson of the UN World Food Program (WFP) reported shipments blocked by mudslides. "We unloaded the food from trucks and put it on to donkeys and mules to reach localities where people had not eaten for a week," she said. In a three-day period, the WFP and Care International distributed 120 tons of food, enough to feed 48,000 families for one day. With the rice and fruit harvests destroyed in Haiti's breadbasket, the Artibonite, Haiti cannot feed itself. For CARE International country director Abby Maxman, recalling that "Haiti has already taken enormous blows in the past year from drought, flooding, and political unrest," the storm is not the story. "This latest disaster just underscores the importance not just of emergency aid, but of long-term solutions to poverty," Maxman said.

Taken together with assessments that, since the February dissolution of Haiti's government, responses to the country's plight have been inadequate, Maxman's observation leads to a conclusion that the assistance now arriving is nothing more than what has been necessary for the whole of 2004 to date.

### *More soldiers, but not enough*

Peacekeeping troops have long complained their numbers are too small to control massive lawlessness, both on the part of the desperately poor and on the part of marauding quasi-political paramilitaries seeking power. Now more soldiers will come. Sri Lanka will send a first-ever overseas contingent of 750 troops to join the operations. A first installment of 128 soldiers is already en route. They will add their numbers to the planned 6,700 soldiers (see NotiCen, 2004-22-04) and 1,600 police who had, until this latest disaster, been slow in getting there.

In preparation for deployment, the French Embassy in Colombo has given classes in conversational French to the 750 soldiers. Sri Lanka has asked the UN for these assignments as a way of finding work for its soldiers, idled since a February 2002 truce with rebel Tamil Tigers, and soon to be unemployed as the likely outcome of peace negotiations. From China, a 130-person special police unit is scheduled to arrive soon. These police are trained for riot and crowd control. Plans are for them to go directly to Gonaives, center of the current catastrophe.

The US administration of President George W. Bush is reportedly wary of the Chinese officials, lest they use this deployment to put pressure on the Haitian government to loosen diplomatic ties with Taiwan. A troubled Bush-administration official, in the shadow of anonymity, told a reporter, "It's been a big year for China. They put a man in space, won gold medals at the Olympics, and now they are going to put troops in the Western Hemisphere for the first time."

### *A flood of donations, but not enough*

On the material side, a flood of donations is expected as InterAction, a coalition of relief agencies, has let it be known that at least 20 of their member nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are accepting contributions for assistance. The agencies range from the ad hoc Haiti Hurricane Response to the best known, such as Oxfam America, the Salvation Army, and other familiar agencies. France has sent 40 tons of emergency aid collected from French NGOs and businesses consisting mostly of water said to be the greatest need at the moment, disinfectants, medicines, and sanitation equipment. French officials said they would also be sending food and other items to the Dominican Republic, which suffered Jeanne damage as well. Pope John Paul II has donated US \$100,000, channeled through the church hierarchy and Caritas in Haiti. The European Union (EU) has donated US\$1.8 million. Venezuela has sent US\$1 million and needed rescue supplies. Japan gave US\$115,000; Switzerland, US\$200,000; Martinique, tents and medicines; the US, US\$50,000 later bumped to US\$2 million after congressional criticism.

These gestures, dwarfed by the extent of the need, are all hampered in the same way the WFP is, by the difficult-to-impossible task of getting supplies to where they are needed. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has issued an appeal for US\$3.3 million to aid 40,000 Haitians during a six-month period. Buzzing around the donors, their money, and their supplies are opportunists on the ground, according to one report.

Said radio reporter Kevin Pina, "Everybody's falling all over themselves to start an organization, to get part of the money and the aid they know is going to come in, and that includes people like the Group of 184, which was the opposition against President Jean-Bertrand Aristide (see NotiCen, 2004-03-04), and the Convergence Democratique (CD) led by Evans Paul. Even political parties are now forming their own relief agencies in the hope that some of this aid will be funneled through their groups." This is a disaster made worse by what has gone before. Besides the lack of roads to bring help and the lack of trees to hold back mud and water, the political climate also works against aiding those in need.

The former military has taken several townships as UN forces stood by and has driven out local police, making for a security disaster as well. The Disaster Preparedness Network, build with USAID

financing during the last two years, was destroyed with the ouster of President Aristide. Now there is no infrastructure to cope. Even with new troops coming to lend a hand against this tide of lack, the total number of soldiers in the country will not approach the 6,700 anticipated by the UN. Only 2,700, or 40% of that number, have actually arrived.

On Sept. 28, the UN called for more international forces to be sent to Gonaives to secure food deliveries. Spokesperson for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs Elizabeth Byrs said, "We need more soldiers to ensure distribution is carried out calmly. We need more for the safety and the secure distribution of food for these people who have been starving for five days." The UN has so far been able to set up two distribution points for 40,000 of the 200,000 people who live in the city on the northern side of the island. Troops already in the city have fired warning shots and used tear gas to disperse mobs ransacking deliveries or threatening to do so.

Also heard from regarding the situation in Haiti was Secretary-General of the Organization of American States (OAS) Miguel Angel Rodriquez, who told the annual meeting of the Pan-American Health Organization (PHO), "Our challenge in Haiti is enormous, and we are called on to take effective, quick, and urgent action." Rodriquez called the situation "a gigantic challenge for the social conscience of the Americas." His call was unique in acknowledging that "the fragility and vulnerability that Haiti is experiencing now is the product of decades of poverty." But he was not reported to have expanded that notion into a call for an ongoing campaign that would permit the country to achieve anything like self-sufficiency in the long run.

From statistics compiled by the PHO, the average Haitian dies at age 50. Chronic malnutrition, not just five days of starvation, plagues 25% of the children. Half the population lacks access to clean drinking water and medicine. The history thus far is clear; when the ill winds subside, not much good blows Haiti's way.

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