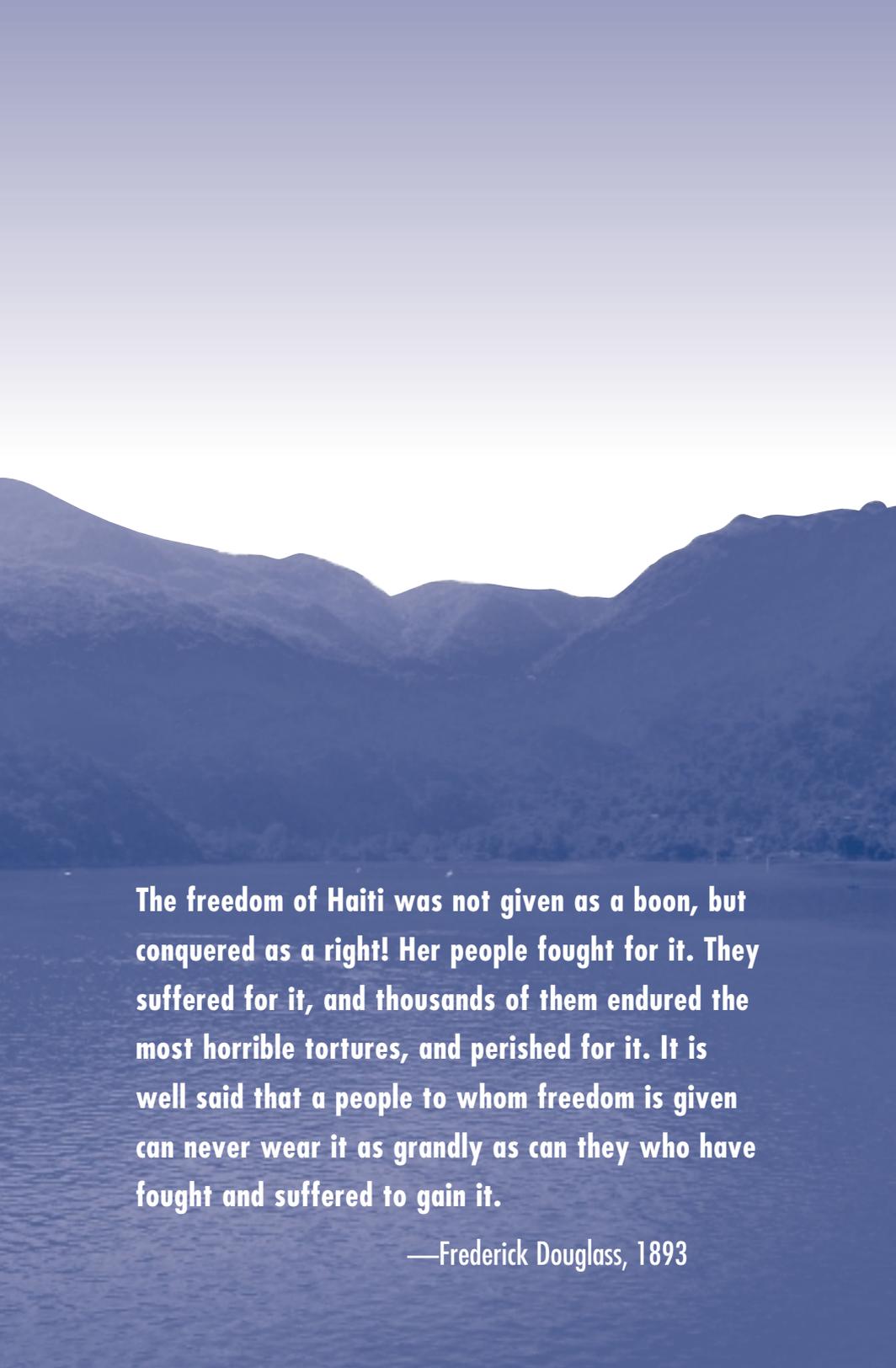


**THE  
U.S.  
WAR  
AGAINST  
HAITI**

**Hidden  
from the  
Headlines**



**The freedom of Haiti was not given as a boon, but conquered as a right! Her people fought for it. They suffered for it, and thousands of them endured the most horrible tortures, and perished for it. It is well said that a people to whom freedom is given can never wear it as grandly as can they who have fought and suffered to gain it.**

**—Frederick Douglass, 1893**

## The U.S. War Against Haiti

The year 2004 marks 200 years of Haitian independence. In 1791, 400,000 Africans enslaved in Haiti rose up against French colonial rule. Jean-Jacques Dessalines declared Haiti a free nation in 1804, culminating the world's only successful revolution of enslaved people. From the beginning, Haiti found itself isolated and besieged. The United States led a worldwide boycott against Haiti and refused to recognize the new nation until 1864, fearing that its freedom would pose a danger to the U.S. system of slavery. In 1825, the Haitian people were forced to assume a debt to France of 90 million gold francs (equivalent to \$21.7 billion today) as "reparations" to their former "owners", in return for diplomatic recognition and trade. To make the first payment, Haiti closed all its public schools in what has been called the hemisphere's first case of structural adjustment.

Not much has changed. Today, as Haitians attempt to create an alternative to debt, dependence and the indignity of foreign domination, the attacks continue. Since the election of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in 2000, the United States has moved to sabotage Haiti's fledgling democracy through an economic aid embargo, massive funding of elite opposition groups, support for paramilitary coup attempts, and a propaganda offensive against the Aristide government. While the Bush Administration imposes its rule over Iraq, attempts to topple the elected government of Venezuela, ignites yet another anti-Castro campaign against Cuba, and undermines civil liberties here at home, the U.S.-led assault on Haiti has gone largely unnoticed. Hidden from the headlines for years, this campaign has now become an open effort to destroy a progressive, popularly elected government.



**ECONOMIC EMBARGO: TARGETING THE HAITIAN PEOPLE**

Since 2000, the Bush Administration has effectively blocked more than \$500 million in international loans and aid to Haiti. This included a \$146 million dollar loan package from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) intended for healthcare, education, transportation and potable water. Under the terms of the loan agreement, Haiti paid fees and interest totaling more than \$5

million long before seeing any money. Since December 2001, the Haitian gourde has lost 69% of its value and Haiti's foreign reserves have shrunk by 50%, largely due to the embargo.

Under intense pressure from the Congressional Black Caucus, Caribbean nations and solidarity groups worldwide, the Bush Administration finally signed an agreement brokered by the Organization of American States (OAS) to release the funds in September 2002. The Haitian government was asked to pay \$66 million in arrears before receiving any loans. These arrears are for debts incurred primarily by Haiti's U.S.-supported dictatorships and military juntas. It took nearly a year, filled with delays and excuses, before the IDB took concrete steps to distribute any of the funds. It is worth noting that throughout the bloody Duvalier regime and the military juntas that followed, economic aid flowed freely.

*There may not be the bullet-ridden bodies ... but there are bodies. They are the nameless, faceless poor, who buckle under the weight of an embargo that—incredibly—denies their elected government already-approved loans for safe drinking water, literacy programs, and health care.*

*—Randall Robinson,  
Founder, TransAfrica*

In addition, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have once again imposed onerous loan conditions on Haiti. In one attempt to meet IMF requirements, the Haitian government eliminated subsidies on gasoline prices. The price of gas doubled, transportation costs shot up 60%, and the cost of living skyrocketed.

Under the best of circumstances Haiti faces enormous challenges: the legacy of colonialism and slavery, a history of military rule, harrowing polarization

of wealth, grinding economic poverty, lack of infrastructure, a badly damaged environment, and two centuries of education denied to the majority. The unconscionable embargo made the situation even worse. A few examples paint a grim picture. Haitians' access to potable water has decreased significantly, particularly in Port-au-Prince. The government has been unable to maintain rural road networks. As a result, rural clinics have noted a steep rise in trauma cases resulting from road accidents. Infectious disease outbreaks are on the rise, as the diminished public health care system struggles to respond. Blocking humanitarian aid in this manner has clearly been a crime against the people of Haiti.

### UNDERMINING THE DEMOCRATICALLY ELECTED GOVERNMENT

While obstructing aid and loans, the U.S. has spent millions to fund the "Democratic Convergence," an opposition group conceived of and orchestrated by the International Republican Institute (a Reagan Administration program to "advance democracy"). The Convergence has no coherent social, political or economic program. Instead, it advocates continuation of economic sanctions, the return of the military (disbanded by Aristide in 1995), and the violent overthrow of the Haitian government. Since 2000, the Convergence has refused to participate in any electoral process for the obvious reason that it has almost no popular support. In national polling in Haiti, the total vote for the dozen or so parties that make up the Convergence has never been more than 12%. U.S. support for this small, destructive group shows disdain for the will of the democratic majority in Haiti.

Unable to win power through elections, the Convergence has organized a series of "strikes" in an attempt to undermine and eventually oust the Aristide government. These are carbon copies of the management-led oil industry strikes in Venezuela aimed at toppling the democratically elected government of Hugo Chavez. In Haiti, foreign-owned businesses like Domino's Pizza and Shell Gas, as well as banks, gas stations, and some specialty shops, supported the "strikes". The vast majority of Haiti's populace, however, kept their marketplaces open despite threats of violence. During recent "strikes", market women and *tap-tap* drivers held up five fingers in defiance, to signify their determination that Aristide should complete his five-year term.



## VIOLENT PARAMILITARY ATTACKS

# A *Contra* War Against Haiti

In the face of widespread popular support for Aristide and his Lavalas Party, anti-Aristide forces have turned to violent paramilitary attacks, leading many Haitians to fear another U.S.-backed coup d'état. Groups of former Haitian military have received arms, training and shelter within the Dominican Republic with the clear knowledge of U.S. authorities. In the early morning hours of July 28, 2001, commandos dressed in military uniforms attacked five police stations in Haiti, including the police academy in Freres. The director of the police academy was executed and four other police officers were murdered during the attacks.



On December 17, 2001, 30 commandos with heavy weaponry attacked and took over the national palace. They announced that Aristide was no longer the President, and attempted to coerce the palace security to

join them in a coup d'état. The gunmen were eventually fought off by the Haitian police, and by thousands of civilians who took to the streets to defend their government when they heard that a coup was in progress. Some of the assailants escaped to the Dominican Republic, where they were given asylum.

In late 2002 and in 2003, former military groups carried out cross-border attacks in towns along the Dominican border, murdering police officers, Lavalas officials and civilians, and terrorizing the population.

On May 7, 2003, 20 men identifying themselves as former Haitian military attacked the hydroelectric power plant at Peligre. One of the largest buttress dams in Latin America, Peligre provides most of Haiti's electricity. The commandos tortured and then murdered two security guards and set fire to the control room, causing immediate power outages around the country. The paramilitary group held several staff members from the nearby Partners in Health hospital at gunpoint and later stole their ambulance. In commenting on the attack, hospital director Dr. Paul Farmer said, "As you know, this is not the first time our medical staff has been the victim of these 'contras.' In December, they used the same threats and the same language, accusing (quite accurately) Aristide of dismantling the army and our own team of being anti-military (also accurate enough). And recall that the so-called human rights groups in Port-au-Prince informed the *Miami Herald* that this harassment did not even happen: it was merely 'pro-government propaganda'."

***Why has this destructive campaign against the Haitian people been allowed to continue without a resounding response from the progressive community here in the United States?***

A key factor has been the highly organized and persistent campaign to discredit and defame the Aristide government internationally. The steady drumbeat of criticism in articles from a compliant corporate media has been echoed by some prominent human rights organizations. Unfortunately, this campaign has sown doubt about President Aristide's legitimacy and progressive credentials in the minds of people who might otherwise defend a democratically elected government committed to social change. These doubts and charges need to be seriously addressed and answered.

## Human Rights: A Look at the Record

**H**aiti has made dramatic progress in the area of human rights over the past eight years. After 200 years of Haitian history, state-sponsored terrorism is no longer part of the daily lives of Haiti's citizens. In 1995, with

near universal support from the Haitian people, Aristide disbanded the Haitian military, perhaps the single greatest advance in Haiti since independence. Clearing away the prime historic instrument of state repression has allowed the Haitian people to enjoy a level of freedom of speech and assembly unprecedented in Haitian history. Today over 200 radio stations operate freely in Haiti. Far from being silenced, opposition politicians dominate the media in Haiti; wealthy Haitians who do not support Aristide own most stations and newspapers and Convergence members are often interviewed on government-run Haitian National Television. The Convergence, briefly and illegally, even set up a "parallel government" until, in the words of *Haiti Progres*, "it collapsed under the weight of its own ridiculousness."

The long-term work of building an independent judiciary system in Haiti began with the restoration of

**Our government and the international financial institutions should not continue to raise the political bar in order for Haiti to receive basic humanitarian assistance. It is unacceptable to simply stand by and watch a season of misery inflict pain, suffering and death on human beings right here in our own neighborhood.**

**—Representative  
Barbara Lee**



# Elections in Haiti: What's The Real Story?

A potent aspect of the anti-Aristide campaign has been the steady insinuation that Haiti's recent elections were tarnished. A quick review of the facts demonstrates this is false.

**1991** Aristide was elected President with 67% of the vote in Haiti's first democratic elections. After only eight months in office he was ousted in a coup d'etat by a U.S.-backed military junta which then terrorized Haiti for the next three years.

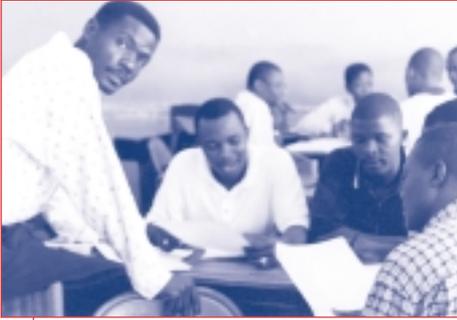
**1996** Aristide stepped down at the end of his term as mandated by the constitution—despite having spent three of his five years in office in exile.

**1996–2001** President René Preval became the first democratically elected president to serve his full term in office.

**MAY 2000** Aristide's *Fanmi Lavalas* party won 90% of local and legislative offices in the country. The Organization of American States (OAS) and every international observer lauded these elections as historic for their voter participation and non-violence. 7,500 posts were filled in these elections. When the results were announced, a conflict broke out between the OAS and the Haitian electoral council concerning seven senate seats. In an attempt to resolve the crisis the seven Senators have long since resigned, but the international attack on Haiti continues.

**NOVEMBER 2000** Aristide was overwhelmingly re-elected, with 92% of the vote. Local and international observers put voter turnout at 65%. Bowing to U.S. pressure, the OAS refused to send observers and the opposition boycotted the elections. Still there is no dispute that the vast majority of Haiti's population voted, once again, for President Aristide. Gallup polls conducted in Haiti before and after the elections confirm both the voter turnout and the numbers who voted for Aristide.

constitutional order in 1994. It will take years to train a new generation of lawyers and judges. Victims' groups insist that the prosecution of coup-period violence is paramount to the defense of human rights and establishment of a state



of law in Haiti. The government of Haiti has committed significant resources to these prosecutions. The Raboteau trial in 2000, in which 16 former soldiers and paramilitaries were convicted of the coup-period massacre of residents in the Raboteau neighborhood of Gonaives, proved that Haiti's justice system can carry out complex, controversial prosecutions. Hoping to build on the success of this case, lawyers for the government

are working with women's organizations and victims' groups to build a case against the military for the use of rape as a political weapon during the coup period.

Still, critics of the Aristide government—including international organizations such as Reporters without Borders, the National Coalition for Haitian Refugees and Amnesty International—point to what they call a deteriorating human rights situation in Haiti marked by violence against opponents of the government, and harassment of journalists. Often they attribute these acts to “pro-Lavalas” mobs, a catchall description which, given the popularity of Lavalas, encompasses most of the population. But there is no evidence that any political violence receives direction from the state. As President, Aristide has consistently condemned acts of violence by all parties, and has been vocal in his calls for the peaceful resolution of conflicts. On several occasions the government has arrested prominent supporters accused of crimes, even in the face of popular protest.

No one would deny the existence of political violence in Haiti today. The situation on the ground between supporters and opponents of the current government is highly volatile. Armed attacks against the government, and the call of the political opposition for the violent overthrow of the government provoke fear and violence in turn. In this situation, ordinary citizens feel they are under attack and must defend themselves and their government.

International coverage of human right violations in Haiti ignores this overall context—and the attention given is highly selective. Cases that involve opposition politicians receive widespread coverage. But two commando-style assaults on the elected government, the murder of a

Every time the Haitians are allowed to elect who they want they make the mistake of not electing the kind of people the United States government wants. In fact, they keep electing the same guy, the one who is pushing social and economic rights for the poor.

—Dr. Paul Farmer, medical director of Zanmi Lasante, September 2002

Lavalas justice of the peace, and the deaths of pro-government demonstrators at the hands of government opponents have been met with deafening silence—and in some cases the outright denial that these acts have taken place. Furthermore, in many cases the opposition has deliberately distorted the facts in order to make political use of human rights violations.

**The U.S. government's underlying motive for the embargo is not to improve the human rights situation in Haiti, but rather to achieve the implied objective of changing the current democratically elected government.**

—Loune Viaud,  
Robert F. Kennedy  
Human Rights Laureate for  
her work providing health  
care in rural Haiti.

The reality is that Haiti has largely eliminated the human right violations of the dictatorship period and is now struggling with the human rights problems of a fledgling democracy. While political violence continues—egged on by the United States' attempts to destabilize the Haitian government—there is no pattern of systematic state repression. There have been cases of use of excessive force by police and security forces. But more frequently the police are faulted for incompetence due to lack of experience and shortages of personnel and funds. There are profound weaknesses in the judicial system, which was in the hands of Duvalierists for decades prior to 1994. Many in the grassroots movement have denounced attempts by the Convergence to use the judicial system as a vehicle for falsely charging and detaining leaders of popular organizations. In addition, there has been slow progress in criminal investigations into some of the most prominent human rights cases. Faced with these complex issues, the government of Haiti is making a determined effort towards constructing an independent judiciary in Haiti.



**IN THIS LIGHT, IT IS WORTH LOOKING CLOSELY AT SOME RECENT HUMAN RIGHTS CASES:**

■ On December 3, 2001, Brig-nol Lindor was murdered by a group of men in the town of Petit Goaves. Reports identified

Lindor as a journalist murdered by a pro-Lavalas mob. The case eventually received so much international attention that the OAS included progress on its investigation as a precondition for the release of aid. Yet outside of Haiti, the full story of Lindor's murder received no coverage. According to the *Agence Haitienne de Presse* (December 13, 2001), Lindor was murdered in reprisal for a violent attack

on a Lavalas activist, who was hacked with machetes and left for dead by an anti-government mob. His enraged friends sought revenge and attacked the first Convergence supporter they found—Lindor. Clearly both acts of violence should be condemned. In fact, the Haitian government did just that, and eventually made arrests on both sides. None of this appeared in the international media.

■ In January 2003, Eric Pierre, a medical student, was murdered on his way home from the State University. The Convergence claimed Pierre was murdered by a Lavalas gang and turned his funeral into an anti-government protest. This story was widely published abroad. Journalist Anne Marguerite Augustin, a witness to the crime, told the press and police that the murder was not politically motivated; rather it was the work of common criminals who also attempted to rob her. After making these statements, Augustin received death threats. No human rights or journalists' organizations rushed to her defense.

■ Since the restoration of democracy in 1994, there have been several assassinations or assassination attempts targeting leaders on all sides of the political spectrum. Investigations in these cases have been agonizingly slow. The April 2000 murder of popular pro-democracy journalist Jean Dominique has drawn the most international attention. Jean Dominique was a life-long crusader for democracy and a vocal critic of the U.S. role in Haitian affairs. At the time of his death, he was broadcasting scathing reports about U.S. government interference in the upcoming Haitian elections.

The Haitian government committed unprecedented resources to the investigation into his murder. Dozens of witnesses were questioned, and five suspects, including the accused gunman, were arrested. But the case has been marred by controversy. Two suspects died in police custody and several judges resigned from the case. A Lavalas Senator (who was a suspect) invoked parliamentary immunity and refused to be questioned by the first investigating judge. In February 2003, the investigating judge submitted his indictment against the five suspects in custody. Advocates for the case, including Michelle Montas, Jean Dominique's widow, were disappointed that the indictment did not go further and point to the intellectual authors of the crime. She filed an appeal and, in August 2004, an appellate judge ordered the investigation reopened.

We strongly believe that whoever is guilty—regardless of their political affiliation—should be brought to justice. We support the campaign to maintain pressure on authorities in Haiti to see that justice is fully done. However, we object to the use of this case by those—including the U.S. government and members of the Convergence—who had no love for Jean Dominique when he was alive, and no previous interest in justice in Haiti—but rather are using this case for their own political purposes.

■ On March 20, 2003, the *Associated Press* reported that “police fired tear gas and used nightsticks to disperse 300 anti-government demonstrators near the

National Palace.” What they did not report was that these protesters insisted—over police objections—on changing the route of their march to go to the National Palace where hundreds of pro-government demonstrators were rallying. Predictably, a melee broke out and police were forced to break it up. (*Haiti Progres*, March 2003) The *AP* story closed with a quote from Convergence leader Gerard Pierre Charles, who declared, “the government is more repressive than ever.”

■ In November 2002, former soldiers operating out of the Dominican Republic murdered Justice of the Peace Christophe Lozama. Neither this attack, nor the murders of a member of Parliament, police officers and civilians by these contra-like forces over the past two years, have received international press or human rights attention. U.S. press reports instead have cast doubt on the existence of these paramilitary groups, claiming “reports are difficult to verify.” In fact, these armed commandos have made their intentions quite clear. On December 19, 2002, a group of former military seized a radio station in the town of Pernal on the Dominican border. They issued a communiqué calling upon all former military to join them in attacks against the police, grassroots organizations, Catholic base communities, and other Lavalas supporters. They stated that they were the armed wing of the opposition, and that they intended to overthrow Aristide and reinstate the Haitian military. (*Haiti Progres*, March 2003)

## Haiti Today: A Progressive Social and Economic Agenda



In spite of the sustained attack on Haiti by the IMF, the World Bank, and the U.S. government, some U.S.-based critics on the left accuse the Aristide government of selling out to the forces of economic globalization. While ignoring dramatic advances under Aristide, they point to plans for a “free trade zone” on the Dominican border or to the ending of the gas price subsidies as signs that Lavalas has abandoned its progressive policies.

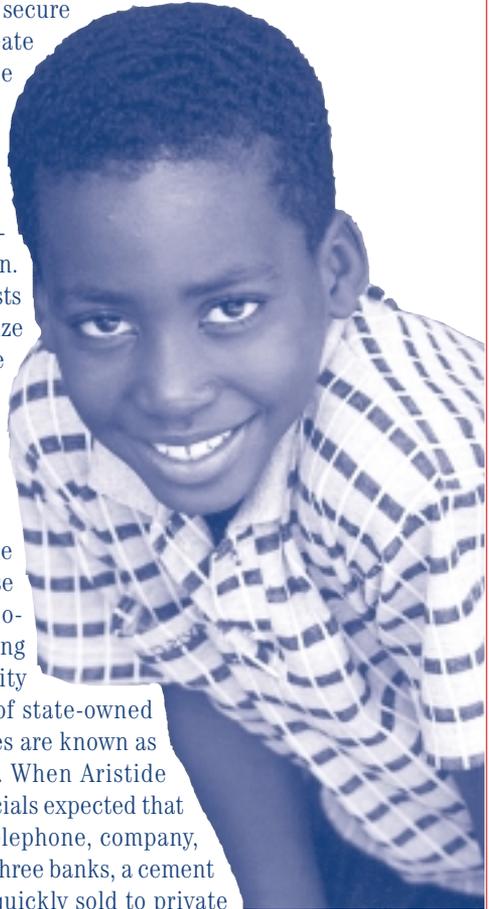
These critics completely disre-

gard Haiti's reality. Haiti is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, has a 70% unemployment rate and now confronts a brutal U.S.-orchestrated embargo. Haiti, like every other developing nation in the world, has no choice but to negotiate with international lenders to secure investment, release loans and create new jobs. The fact remains: the United States is attacking Haiti's government and popular organizations not because Haiti is a compliant partner, but precisely because it represents an alternative to globalization and corporate domination. Rather than sit in judgment, activists and friends of Haiti need to mobilize to end the U.S. embargo. In the process we will help to give Haiti the space it needs to carry out its own sovereign agenda.

### RESISTING GLOBALIZATION

Since 1994 the Haitian people and government have borne intense pressure to adopt neoliberal economic policies, such as the opening of markets to U.S. goods, austerity programs and the privatization of state-owned enterprises. In Haiti these policies are known as *plan lanmo* or the "death plan". When Aristide returned to Haiti in 1994, U.S. officials expected that Haiti's public enterprises (the telephone, company, electrical company, airport, port, three banks, a cement factory and flourmill) would be quickly sold to private corporations, preferably to U.S. multinationals working in partnership with the Haitian elite. In the last months of his first term as President, Aristide refused to move forward with privatization, calling instead for a national dialogue on the issue. It was at this point that \$550 million in promised international aid stopped flowing. Despite this pressure, only the flourmill and the cement plant have been sold.

The Haitian government has made major investments in agriculture, public transportation and infrastructure. While international funds for large road construction projects have been blocked, the Government of Haiti has undertaken smaller road projects, linking the countryside to city and enabling farmers to get their food to market. Public marketplaces have been rebuilt in many

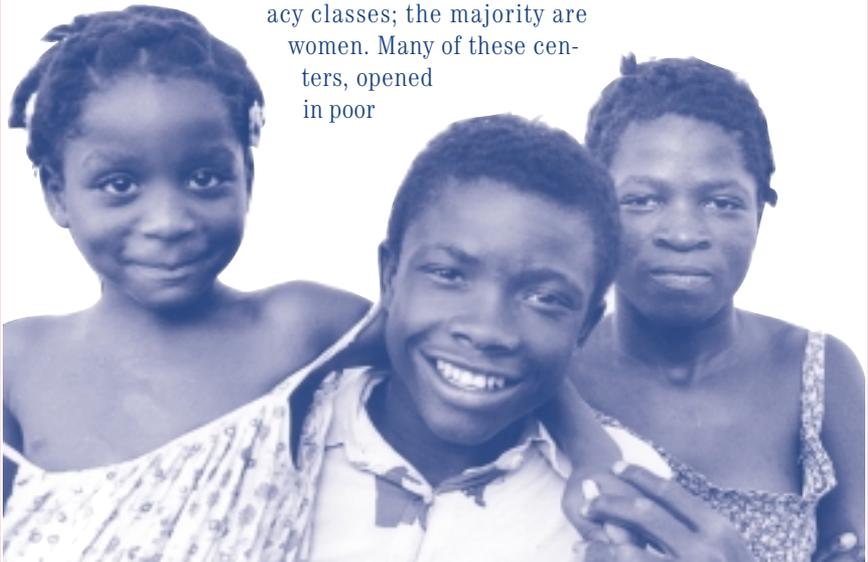


rural and urban communities. Despite strong opposition from the business sector, on February 7, 2003, Aristide doubled the minimum wage from 36 to 70 *gourdes* a day. This wage hike affects the more than 20,000 people who work in Port-au-Prince assembly factories, which contract with major U.S. corporations such as Wal-Mart and Disney.

## EDUCATION

Education and healthcare have been high priorities during both Aristide administrations. Haiti is currently implementing a *Universal Schooling Program* aimed at giving every child an education. More schools were built in Haiti from 1994–2000 than between 1804 and 1994—many in rural areas where no schools existed previously. In 2001, Aristide mandated that 20% of the national budget be dedicated to education. Other measures aimed at increasing access to education include a 70% government subsidy of schoolbooks and uniforms, and expanded school lunch and school bus programs. Since there are not yet nearly enough public schools for all of Haiti's children, the Haitian government provides hundreds of thousands of scholarships for children to attend private schools.

Haiti's rate of illiteracy currently stands between 55% and 60%. In the summer of 2001, the Haitian government launched a national literacy campaign. The Secretary of State for Literacy has printed 2 million literacy manuals, and trained thousands of college and high school students as literacy workers. The students committed to teach throughout the country for the next three years. Working with church and *voudouizan* groups, popular organizations and thousands of women's groups across the country, the government has opened 20,000 adult literacy centers. Some 320,000 people are currently in literacy classes; the majority are women. Many of these centers, opened in poor



urban and rural areas, are *resto-alphas* which combine a literacy center and a community kitchen, providing low-cost meals to communities in need.

## DEFENDING CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

An estimated 400,000 young children, primarily girls, work as domestics in Haitian households. The majority of these children come from rural Haiti and are sent to the cities by their parents in hopes that they will receive food, education and shelter in exchange for their labor. Often, in addition to long hours and hard work, these *restaveks* are subject to abuse, violence and neglect. In May 2003, Haiti passed legislation prohibiting trafficking in persons, and banning the provision of the labor code which formerly sanctioned child domestic labor. The bill followed a law enacted in October 2001, which banned all forms of corporal punishment against children. In addition, Haiti is taking specific measures to ensure that *restavek* children get an education. Government scholarship funds for the 2003–2004 school year will target *restavek* children, and President Aristide has called on all families who have *restavek* children living in their homes to send them to school.

These advances were dismissed by the U.S. State Department, which, in a particularly cynical move, placed Haiti in the category of “least compliant countries” in relation to the trafficking of persons. The State Department report ignored the recent legislation, as well as other Haitian government measures against trafficking—including stepped up border patrols and the creation of a special police unit to protect minors against all forms of abuse. The report failed to acknowledge Haiti’s *Universal Schooling Program*, even though the State Department cited increased school enrollment in other countries as a significant preventive measure against trafficking.

*In the past 18 years we in the developing world have paid 368 billion dollars [to the international institutions], an amount greater than what was lent to us. Why is it not possible to find the mere 80 billion that the United Nations estimates is needed to eliminate poverty on earth?*

—President  
*Jean-Bertrand Aristide,*  
May 18, 2003

## HEALTH CARE

The government of Haiti has focused its national healthcare program on improving maternal and pre-natal health conditions. In 2002, the School of Midwifery was renovated, as were the maternity wards of eight public hospitals. Tragically, funds from the IDB for a project to decentralize and reorganize the Haitian health care system were blocked for four years.

Through a cooperative relationship with Cuba, 800 Cuban healthcare workers now work in rural areas of Haiti. An additional 325 Haitians are in training

in Cuba, and in return they have committed to work in public health on their return to Haiti. Two hundred Haitians are also studying at a new medical school in Haiti, which is part of the Aristide Foundation for Democracy. A school for nursing is slated to open in fall 2004. In a country with fewer than 1,000 doctors, the striking increase in healthcare workers, both Cuban and Haitian, is having a dramatic impact.

International experts have lauded Haiti's government-led initiative to coordinate AIDS treatment and prevention. After a long debate over how best to ensure the rights and welfare of Haitian participants, Haiti joined an important three-country AIDS vaccine trial. In 2002, the UN Global Fund for AIDS, Malaria and Tuberculosis chose Haiti as one of the first three recipients of grants. The two-year, \$18 million grant will finance a broad spectrum of work to treat and prevent AIDS in rural

and urban areas, including the provision of anti-retroviral treatment to some AIDS patients. Some of these funds will support the groundbreaking work of Partners in Health at the Central Plateau hospital founded by Dr. Paul Farmer, which pro-

## FREEDOM OF RELIGION

**In May of 2003 President Aristide issued a decree fully recognizing Vodou as a religion. Significantly, the state will now recognize baptisms, marriages and funerals performed by Vodou officials. Vodou, a religious tradition with roots in Africa, has often been maligned internationally. It is widely practiced in Haiti, but has been marginalized as the religion of the poor and uneducated. Practitioners of Vodou were brutally persecuted in official anti-Vodou campaigns as recently as the 1930s, and then again in violent attacks during the 1980s. State recognition of Vodou is an important step in guaranteeing religious freedom in Haiti. It is also a step forward in breaking down Haiti's social caste system, which has traditionally stigmatized the rural poor and their culture.**



vides AIDS treatment and medication to patients free of charge.

The possibility of life-saving treatment has a direct impact on the willingness of people to be tested for HIV, which is critical to any AIDS prevention campaign. Twenty new HIV testing centers will open around the country during the next two years. In the words of First Lady Mildred Aristide, who oversees the government's AIDS program, the testing centers are critical so that "Haitians—women in particular, who have been most vocal in wanting to know their HIV status—can become active agents of prevention, information and education—passing that onto to their children."

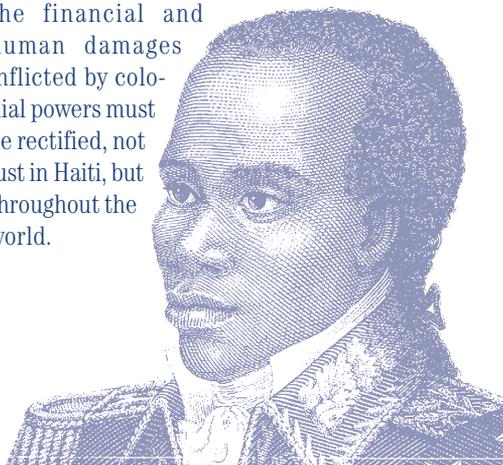
Clearly, these programs represent a progressive agenda, initiated under the most trying conditions. They give hope to the people of Haiti, as demonstrated by the massive popular support that continues to be manifested for the Aristide government. And they are the reason that the United States government has targeted the government of Haiti. The current U.S. destabilization campaign continues a centuries-long assault on the world's first black republic. As the people of Haiti prepare to commemorate the bicentennial of their independence, they deserve solidarity and support, not harassment. *Let Haiti Live.*

### HAITI CALLS FOR RESTITUTION

In 1825 France forced Haiti to assume a debt of 90 million to "compensate" French plantation slave-owners for their "financial losses" in exchange for France's recognition of Haiti's independence. It took Haiti close to 100 years to pay off this debt. Haiti was unable to fund schools, health care, or infrastructure and the logging of its tropical forests was accelerated, setting the stage for the current deforestation crisis.

Today, on behalf of the people of Haiti, President Jean-Bertrand Aristide has requested that France retribute to the Haitian people this "debt" money—21.7 billion dollars in today's currency. France has formally recognized slavery to be a crime against humanity and many of its legislators have verbally recognized the legitimacy of Haiti's request. Yet, in an echo of the ugly "1825" past, the French government has rejected the request and placed Haiti on a list of "undesirable" countries not to be visited.

As Haiti starts the celebration of its bicentennial, we ask you to support the Haitian people in their claim for restitution. Restitution will help pave the road toward true economic rebuilding, and send a clear message that the financial and human damages inflicted by colonial powers must be rectified, not just in Haiti, but throughout the world.



The Haiti Action Committee is a Bay Area-based network of activists who have supported the Haitian struggle for democracy since 1991. For further information, resources and links to groups working in solidarity with Haiti, visit Haiti Action Committee's website at [www.haitisolidarity.net](http://www.haitisolidarity.net)

#### CREDITS

Written for the Haiti Action Committee by Laura Flynn, Pierre Labossiere and Robert Roth. August 2003.

Designed by Lisa Roth

#### PHOTOS

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Page 16	From <i>Aristide Foundation for Democracy</i>

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**HAITI ACTION COMMITTEE**

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