haiti solidarity

The newsletter of Haiti Action Committee.
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We dedicate this issue of Haiti Solidarity to Kiilu Nyasha, veteran Black Panther who joined the party in 1969, indomitable fighter for freedom, and a great friend of Haiti. Her recent passing leaves a hole in our hearts, in our souls, and in our movements. As she said often, “Freedom is a constant struggle,” and her example will stay with us always.

This issue celebrates the unbreakable resistance of the people of Haiti who have persevered in the face of US-orchestrated coups, a series of stolen elections, violent repression, and natural disasters made even worse by corporate greed and government corruption. Sometimes that resistance manifests itself in the streets, such as in the ongoing mobilizations against the theft of PetroCaribe funds. Sometimes it is shown in the daily work of creating and sustaining democratic institutions. The recent graduation of 77 doctors, 48 nurses, and 13 lawyers from the University of the Aristide Foundation (UniFA) is one such example—and we center this issue around honoring that achievement.

The Trump Administration has demonized Haitians and ended Temporary Protected Status for 57,000 Hondurans and an estimated 59,000 Haitians living in the US in the wake of the devastating earthquake of 2010 and subsequent political repression and natural disasters, including Hurricane Matthew in 2016. We oppose the US Government’s overtly racist policy and will continue to fight it.

We would be remiss if we did not express our solidarity with the people of Palestine, who have braved Israeli fire to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the Nakba, the catastrophic removal of 750,000 Palestinians from their homeland as the settler colonial state of Israel was created. Each week, unarmed Palestinians have been killed just for demanding their right to return to their homes. Free Palestine!

We are also proud to feature two new articles about the parallel struggles for freedom and autonomy in Puerto Rico and Venezuela. Our movements are connected—and the outcome depends on the strength and depth of our solidarity.

Finally, we send our love and support to Herman Bell, who has just been released from prison at the age of 70, after more than 44 years of incarceration. Herman’s parole sends a signal that the continued mass incarceration of black and brown communities, of older prisoners, and of political prisoners will be fought until they are freed. Welcome home, Herman!
Trump’s Racist Comments About Haiti and Africa Is Not an Aberration
by Nia Imara

This article was originally published online in The Progressive on January 24, 2018.

Trump’s racist comments about Haiti and African countries—made January 11 on the eve of the eighth anniversary of the terrible earthquake in Haiti—were vulgar and unacceptable, but they are not an aberration. Rather they reflect the reality of US policy toward so-called “underdeveloped” black and brown nations.

In the wake of Trump’s comments, politicians and media figures rushed to defend Haitian and African immigrants, asserting how hardworking they are; what unique, important contributions they make to America; and reminding us of the hackneyed fallacy that “America was built by immigrants.” By reasoning on these grounds, commentators allow Trump and those with similar anti-immigration rhetoric to dictate the terms of the argument.

US policy toward Haiti has been consistently racist, violent, oppressive, and exploitative. Trump’s particularly crude brand of racism is only the most recent manifestation of timeworn, bipartisan discrimination against black and brown people.

The exclusion of Haiti by the United States began with the Haitian Revolution, more than 200 years ago. Between 1791 and 1810, more than 25,000 whites and free blacks who supported the old regime fled the island to port cities like New Orleans and Philadelphia, sparking an early American refugee crisis. The free black migrants were viewed with suspicion by slaveholding politicians, including President Washington and his Secretary of State, Thomas Jefferson.

After Haiti defeated France in 1804, President Jefferson refused to give the new nation diplomatic recognition. France’s coffers were drained by years of war to preserve its most valuable colony, and Jefferson exploited this opportunity by acquiring the Louisiana Territory (stolen Native American land) for a song. The US, predisposed to be conciliatory toward a fellow slave-holding nation, aided France and other European powers in implementing a diplomatic quarantine of the new black nation.

As noted by Robert Lawless in Haiti’s Bad Press and Paul Farmer in The Uses of Haiti, the United States prevented Haiti’s participation in the Western Hemisphere Panama Conference of 1825. US slavery continued for more than half a century following its abolition in Haiti; it wasn’t until 1862 that the US Government recognized Haiti’s independence.

Democratic President Woodrow Wilson, widely known as a racist, sent the U.S. Marines to invade Haiti in 1915. The Marines transported Jim Crow customs to the island, instituted forced labor, and massacred thousands of Haitians, all in the name of “stability.” In 1919, the troops murdered thirty-two-year-old Charlemagne Peralte, leader of the Cacos peasant movement that resisted the occupation. As a warning against continued rebellion, they attached his dead body to a wooden door for public display. Washington’s lasting legacy was the creation of the Haitian Army.

For decades after the official end of the nineteen-year-old occupation, dictators used the American-made army as an instrument of repression against the people.

The infamous dictator, François “Papa Doc” Duvalier, was given tens of millions of dollars by Washington during the first four years of his reign, which coincided with the Eisenhower Administration. In his book, An Unbroken Agony, Randall Robinson discusses how Papa Doc and his notorious Tontons Macoutes killed an estimated 50,000 people during his rule. Later on, in Paul Farmer’s words, JFK “provided the bloodthirsty killer with military assistance as part of the general program of extending US control over the security forces in Latin America.”

After Papa Doc died in 1971, US support of the dictatorship under his son, Jean-Claude “Baby Doc” Duvalier, became even more entrenched. In the 1970s, both Haiti and El Salvador—another poor Latin American country maligned by Trump—were ruled by US-backed regimes that violently repressed their populations, in order to ensure a submissive, cheap labor force for US companies.

Under the repressive Duvalier dictatorship, which denied labor rights, the assembly sector proliferated in Haiti, and by 1980 the country became the ninth largest manufacturer of assembled goods for US consumption. Today, Haiti’s export economy is dominated by apparel manufacture—such as cheap clothes sold at Walmart, and even parts of US military uniforms. More recently, after the earthquake, the State Department under Hillary Clinton pushed to build a new sweatshop in Haiti with money from USAID.
Even after the Haitian masses successfully ousted Baby Doc in 1986, the momentum of Duvalierism persisted, as the American-trained and -armed military continued its brutal terrorism against the people.

In the next two decades, Washington sponsored and actively participated in two coup d’états against the democratically elected governments of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Each resulted in years of violence and repression; each resulted in the killings of thousands of people; tens of thousands more were imprisoned without due process or were forced to flee their homes.

Soon after the first coup in 1991, President Bush ordered the Coast Guard to return refugees to Haiti. As a presidential candidate, Clinton denounced Bush’s handling of the crisis, but upon taking office he further extended the blockade. In a cynical move, he conveniently defined fleeing Haitians as “economic refugees,” in order to deny them political asylum.

In early 1992, acclaimed dancer Katherine Dunham went on a forty-seven-day hunger strike, urging George H. Bush to change US policy toward Haitian refugees who, under his administration, were being held in deplorable conditions at the US base on Guantanamo. Among other actions, a series of hunger strikes by students and faculty, as well as one by Randall Robinson that lasted nearly a month in 1994, were undertaken to pressure President Clinton to change US policy toward Haitian refugees.

Many gains made under President Aristide’s second administration were reversed after the US-led coup in 2004. The Aristide government, for the first time in Haiti’s history, implemented a universal schooling program. Between 1994 and 2000, more public schools were built in Haiti than during the entire period following the 1804 Revolution—195 primary schools and 104 high schools.

In 2001, Aristide mandated that 20 percent of the government budget go toward education. The aborted Aristide administrations also dedicated a greater percentage of the national budget on health care than any previous administration. His government advocated for improved labor rights and, in 2003, it doubled the minimum wage to 70 gourdes a day (about $1 today), affecting the livelihoods of more than 20,000 assembly factory workers.

But after the 2004 coup, Haiti continued to be under a state of occupation. The country’s infrastructure steadily worsened over the next several years, and the 2010 earthquake was devastating. Far too many homes and lives were lost, and the Haitian people continue to suffer the consequences.

Obama’s response to the initial natural disaster was to send troops to Haiti. Let’s recall how the US military held up thousands of tons of life-saving aid at the Port-au-Prince airport, since its first priority was to provide “stability.” Let’s remember, too, the stories and images—reminiscent of Hurricane Katrina—in which Haitians searching for food and supplies were depicted as “looters” or as members of “gangs.” But ultimately, perhaps, the more significant parallel between Katrina and the Obama Administration’s response to the earthquake is that the US Government used reconstruction as a tool to aid the Haitian elite and multinationals.

If we consider Trump’s racism in the light of history, it is quite in keeping with that of his forty-four predecessors.

Black and brown immigrants do not have to prove their worth. When people try to defend them by asserting how hardworking and deserving they are, these assertions conveniently skirt around the looming truth that centuries of American and European colonialism, neocolonialism, and capitalist exploitation are responsible for the impoverishment that is so widespread amongst today’s black and brown nations. It’s as if a band of robbers looted a home, set it on fire, and then magnanimously defended the fleeing family’s right to sanctuary.

Additionally, the idea that “America was built by immigrants” conceals a larger, racist myth about the origins of this country. This country was built, in the first place, on genocide. It was built on stolen labor, on centuries of kidnap and the brutal separation of families, on the systematic oppression of the descendants of Africa.

It is not an accident that Trump mentioned Haiti and Africa together; the exploitation of African nations and Haiti by the United States and European allies is historically inseparable. Haiti has always proudly identified with its African roots, and the Africa in Haiti is still evident today.

To forge strong, meaningful bonds of solidarity with movements in Haiti and Africa struggling to rebuild their nations after centuries of exploitation, let’s model ourselves after Katherine Dunham, who understood that our ties to each other go far deeper than any man-made borders. ✴
Black Internationalism and the Colonial Challenges Facing Haiti and Venezuela

Jeanette Charles

Painting of Simon Bolivar and Alexandre Petion.
Solidarity as defined by President Aristide takes root in the African philosophy of Ubuntu—Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu: “A person is a person through other human beings. A person becomes a person through the community. A person is a person when she/he treats others well….Ubuntu is the source of all philosophy grounded in solidarity, cooperation, unity, respect, dignity, justice, liberty and love of the other.”
— Jean Bertrand Aristide —
Haïti-Haiti?: Philosophical Reflections for Mental Decolonization

“Haiti has no debt with Venezuela, just the opposite: Venezuela has a historical debt with that nation, with that people for whom we feel not pity but rather admiration, and we share their faith, their hope.”
— Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez —

Upon absolving Haiti of all financial debt in the wake of the 2010 earthquake.

After 35 years of incarceration, political prisoner and freedom fighter Oscar López Rivera was released in 2017. One of his revolutionary lessons urges us to recognize that “colonialism is the problem” we continue to face today. While he specifically referred to Puerto Rico and its colonial status, his reflection is applicable to anywhere in the world devastated by exploitation, occupation, and invasion at the hands of European colonialism and US imperialism. As such, we can examine the current and historical challenges facing both Venezuela and Haiti, as well as their complicated relationship, as cases that expose the open wounds and lasting effects of colonialism and counter-revolutionary attacks against revolutionary processes committed to liberation and the reconfiguration of global power.

Colonialism explains why United Nations forces implicated in mass rape, human trafficking rings, and the cholera epidemic continue to occupy Haiti. Colonialism is the driving force behind former US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson’s spring 2018 tour throughout the Caribbean, intimidating, threatening, and bribing states to vote at the Organization of American States (OAS), in favor of foreign intervention in Venezuela. Colonialism has cultivated the root of complex political, economic, and sociocultural relationships between the states, peoples, and grassroots movements of Venezuela and Haiti.

The most recent US efforts to isolate Venezuela from the region, demoralize its people through a concerted economic war, and intervene in its political process—by working with international collaborators to ultimately punish its black majority revolutionary process—have their historical precedents in Haiti. Haitians experienced these counter-revolutionary attacks as they fought to defend their own revolutionary process under the leadership of Fanmi Lavalas President Jean-Bertrand Aristide and earlier, throughout the era of Haitian Independence.

“Haiti represents a moral and political reference. Chávez once said, you cannot pay back a moral debt, and what Haiti gave us is unpayable,” explains Jesús “Chucho” García—Afro-Venezuelan historian and Consul General for the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela in New Orleans—with respect to Haiti’s critical role in Venezuelan independence.3 The bridges that Africans, and later Haitians, built with pre-independence Venezuela throughout the 18th and 19th centuries took on multiple dimensions, including material aid, strategic development, spiritual force, and principled political vision. Haitians’ intentional support of abolition throughout the Americas ensured South American independence and sowed the roots of the Bolivarian Revolution, which began in 1998 and continues today.

As such, Venezuela’s Bolivarian Revolution has attempted to return this “historical debt” with Haiti, rectify the harms of colonialism, and consolidate a Caribbean and Latin American united front against US imperialism, by extending its reparations model of oil wealth redistribution beyond its borders and by exercising a diplomatic model rooted in regional integration and cooperation. “Beyond Venezuela, I’m thinking about the integration of Latin America, this Afroamerica that is scattered throughout all these lands and all these waters,” Chávez voiced on May 8, 2005 on his television program Aló Presidente, speaking to the legacy of black liberation in the Americas and identifying Haiti. His call compelled hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of Venezuelans to direct their moral and political compass toward the first black republic of the Western Hemisphere.4

Subsequently, Venezuela has provided funds and subsidized oil for Haiti as well as other Caribbean nations through its program PetroCaribe. In the case of Haiti, Venezuela has also ensured additional disaster relief humanitarian aid and dissolved all loans. However, these significant gestures have facilitated contradictory results. Instead of reaching the people and improving economic conditions for the majority Haitian poor, these initiatives have lined the pockets of Haitian Duvalierist elites. Recent mass mobilizations and legislative accounts have denounced corruption of PetroCaribe funds and the

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Disaster capitalism? Shock Doctrine? Whatever you want to call it, these terms are used to describe what has happened to countries hit hard by natural disasters. For Haiti, it was the 2010 earthquake. For Puerto Rico, it’s the recent 2017 mega-hurricane Maria. It’s just the latest for countries colonized and neo-colonized for decades.

These island nations were already feeling the strong arm of structural adjustment—and in Haiti’s case, outright occupation—but these catastrophes that destroyed the majority of the infrastructure exacerbated the situation, resulting in massive displacement and unbridled privatization. And perhaps to make matters even worse, it’s the people who are blamed for the failures of recovery.

Most of you have read the headlines:

“Category 4 Hurricane Maria hits the island of Puerto Rico wiping out most of the infrastructure! Trump Administration slow to respond.”

“They want everything done for them when this should be a community effort.” (Donald Trump talking about Puerto Ricans in response to the hurricane.)

Maria hit landfall on September 20, 2017, and it made a direct hit. Eight months later, much of the island is still without water and electricity. Some estimate that one third to a half of the population is still affected. It is the largest blackout in US history and is not going to end anytime soon. This has had dire consequences, especially for those who are elderly and/or sick. Think about it: How can people get the medical care they need, such as dialysis, if there is no electricity? As of January, the majority of hospitals were still using makeshift power. Although the official death count is 64, even the mainstream media estimates that it is more than 1500. This number doesn’t account for those who will die prematurely due to bad medical care. Then too, how do children go to school without electricity? How do people live without potable water? How do computers work? In other words, how can everyday life occur, let alone a recovery?

Tens of thousands are still without the well-known blue temporary tarps given out by FEMA. (Port-au-Prince is still dotted with similar tarps.) The Federal Government says it has no idea how many people are seeking unemployment compensation. In December, it stated that there was 10% unemployment, but Puerto Ricans themselves know that the figure is much, much higher.

These statistics mask many deeper problems stemming from Puerto Rico’s colonial status, which in turn is responsible for its massive debt of $70 billion. This debt is due to a combination of privatization, fiscal mismanagement, and the consistent looting and bankrupting of Puerto Rico by Wall Street. The island is under a federal receivership plan called PROMESA (Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act, signed by President Obama in May 2016). The answer to the debt was further structural adjustment which was already threatening the livelihoods of Puerto Ricans. Blackouts have been common, workers have been laid off, and schools and hospitals have been closed. Ironically, promesa in Spanish means “promise”!

Even before the hurricane, Puerto Rico had the worst drinking water of any “state”—70% of its water was already contaminated. Its electrical grid was sorely outdated, overly expensive, and prone to blackouts. The US Army Corps of Engineers estimates that Puerto Rico needs 50,000 utility poles and 6,500 miles of cable to restore its power system. It compared the situation to Iraq after the 2003 invasion.

In December there were more blackouts—the parts of the island that had actually had their power restored were again without electricity. The answer to this? When Puerto Rico asked the Federal Government for a loan of one billion dollars to restore its grid, it was turned down and given only $300 million. The Federal judge overseeing the loan request claimed it made bad fiscal policy. Those in charge of the electrical grid said this will only be enough to stave off disaster for the next few months. Already, San Juan is without power much of the time, and more brownouts are being planned. Clearly, this is just one more step towards privatization. Thus, electricity will be more expensive and more Puerto Ricans will be out of work.


**It’s the Shock Doctrine!**

It is now universally acknowledged that the aid response to the massive 2010 earthquake in Haiti was really just a party for graft, corruption, and privatization. It was and remains a giant rip-off. The earthquake is considered one of the worst national disasters in modern history. Three-hundred-thousand people were killed in its aftermath. Entire towns were wiped out, and over one million people were displaced and rendered homeless.

In the eight years since, billions of dollars have supposedly been raised. Celebrities, charities, and NGOs are still talking about how “they’re giving back” by going to “help Haiti.” Yet most of the money has gone into the pockets of everyone except those needing it most.

In Puerto Rico, it’s not just the NGOs, it’s a classic case of crony capitalism. At a time when rural areas are still without power and water, the Governor’s wife is raising millions of dollars (so far $27 million) for her own pet project of national parks. It’s not clear where this money has really gone.

**Haiti and Puerto Rico**

The IMF, known for implementing draconian austerity measures, recently worked out a deal with the Haitian Government. While it purports to want to alleviate poverty, its method is to both privatize and hike up prices especially for essentials like fuel.

A few months after the earthquake, Hillary Clinton famously declared, “Haiti is open for business!” Yet even the particular business she touted—a South Korean-owned low-wage textile factory—has proven to be a bust with little of the promised jobs or output. Corruption is rampant.

It’s the same in Puerto Rico. Two examples: A company in Atlanta with only one employee received a contract for $156 million to deliver 30 million freeze dried meals to the island, where 80% of the agriculture has been wiped out. The company delivered only 30,000 of those meals.

Whitefish Energy, a Montana based company, had only two employees on the day Maria hit the island. But it had close ties to Ryan Zinke, the Secretary of the Interior. It was given a $300 million contract to restore power—despite the fact that it actually had little capability to do so. Eventually, the Puerto Rican Government itself had to cancel the contract.

After the 2010 earthquake, Pierre-Marie Boisson of E-Power, the company contracted to privatize Haiti’s electricity, said, “Earthquakes should be an opportunity because they destroy. Where earthquakes destroy, we have to build. When we have to build we can create jobs, we can create a lot of changes, we can change a country.”

Compare this to: “What happened here is a perfect storm,” said Halsey Minor, the founder of the news site CNET, who is moving his new blockchain company, called Videocoin, to Puerto Rico this winter. Speaking of the hurricane, he said, “While it was really bad for the people of Puerto Rico, in the long term it’s a godsend if people look past that.”

This is an ominous development. In the 19th century, businessmen such as J.P. Morgan, Cornelius Vanderbilt, and Andrew Carnegie accumulated enormous wealth, in large part by “opening up the West.” Manifest Destiny justified the takeover and genocide of indigenous land and resources. Settler colonialism moved those people out and so called “Americans” in. Now there are new robber barons: the techies and these new crypto-entrepreneurs. There is a real threat that Puerto Rico will become the first crypto colony.

As the New York Times reported in February, Puerto Rico is being viewed as the perfect place for a crypto utopia. Investors who have made millions in the new digital “cryptocurrency” are buying up huge swaths of land, hoping to create their own “paradise”—a land with no personal income tax, no capital gains tax, very accommodating business taxes, and no threat to American citizenship.

Rich American male crypto-entrepreneurs, (representing the worst of “tech-bro” culture), have already taken over hotels and even a former children’s museum in San Juan. (This while Puerto Rican art museums are reporting major problems in reopening.) These guys are salivating over the prospect of buying up land in the former naval base at Roosevelt Roads. Wealthy Americans were already displacing many Puerto Ricans—seeing Puerto Rico as either a perfect vacation spot or one to retire in. It’s gentrification on a country-wide scale. It’s a depopulation project, and the hurricane furred that process at an alarming rate.

There are other consequences. The economic disaster in Puerto Rico was already causing an uptick in an underground economy and violence, both of which are now growing. So is prostitution—and since most of these “crypto-tobarons” are men, this will undoubtedly increase and even flourish.

Unlike the big pharmaceutical corporations, which caused immense environmental and health damage, but still provided at least some jobs, these cryptocurrencies offer little employment—except for servants—and leave Puerto Ricans little choice but to succumb to these new robber barons’ desires or leave.

And Puerto Ricans are leaving in massive numbers. In an historic first, there are now more Puerto Ricans residing outside the island than living there. They have no choice. Students have to go to school, but the university is still not

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On the seventh anniversary of that historic return, UniFA held its first graduation ceremony in Port-au-Prince. A delegation of Haiti solidarity activists from the US was honored to be there representing Haiti Action Committee, the Black Alliance for Just Immigration, Global Women’s Strike, and the Haiti Emergency Relief Fund.

In a joyous celebration attended by over 1000 people, UniFA graduated 77 doctors, 48 nurses, and 13 lawyers. The setting was beautiful, the stage decorated with flowers and banners in the blue and white colors of UniFA. The famed Philharmonic Orchestra of Sainte-Trinite played Haitian folk music as well as classical music throughout the event. Cameras were everywhere to record the occasion, which was widely and prominently reported in Haitian media.

The UniFA choir, joined by the entire audience, sang Haiti’s national anthem, and later the song of UniFA. Two young men carrying the flags of Haiti and UniFA proudly led the procession of faculty at the opening of the ceremony. As a child, one of them—soon to become a UniFA graduate—lived at Lafanmi Selavi, the center for street children founded by Aristide when he was a priest. His success is an example of the university’s commitment to overcome social barriers limiting access to higher education. “Education sans exclusion”—education without exclusion—is a central theme of UniFA, imprinted on its logo and manifest in every detail of this remarkable event.

The exhilaration that infused the occasion spoke to UniFA’s broader commitment, expressed by Mrs. Mildred Aristide, “To break down the long tradition of exclusion of the poor majority in Haiti from access to higher education.”

At the podium, Dr. Jean-Bertrand Aristide, President of UniFA, stood to address the gathering. His speech emphasized that the University’s role is not only to instill academic knowledge, but to promote ethical lives and nurture students’ relationship with their community. He spoke of the African philosophy of Ubuntu, which recognizes that the essence of social consciousness can be expressed as “I am because we are”—a person becomes a person through community. Dr. Aristide said, “It is not easy to eradicate evil at a macro level. But on a micro scale you can fight it rationally.” He noted that, “On a global scale, science is advancing, consciousness is declining. May your professional conscience contribute to the awakening of social consciousness.”

To highlight this point, towards the end of the ceremony, each graduating class—MDs, nurses, and lawyers—pledged their commitment to serve their people. In a country with fewer than two doctors for every 11,000 people, UniFA’s graduate physicians are already practicing medicine in regions throughout Haiti where formerly there were no doctors. It is a hopeful victory in difficult times.

After all the graduates received their diplomas, there was a “passing of the torch” ritual during which graduates from each program passed a flaming torch to a student from the upcoming class. Gifts were presented to the valedictorians and, finally, the graduates celebrated with friends and family under an outdoor pavilion on the beautiful campus. Long years of effort to reach this day were visible in faces filled with grace, joy, and pride.

One of UniFA’s chief architects, Mildred Aristide, an attorney and Haiti’s former First Lady, describes the university’s broader mission to nourish democratic space within an undemocratic country: “Haiti vitally needs a safe space where young people can come together, think country, and construct a future under difficult circumstances....
An institution that will address national issues and seek viable solutions to national problems. Dreams of working, prospering, and changing Haiti—not chasing after a foreign visa or a job with a foreign NGO. This is UniFA’s commitment.

UniFA was born out of Haiti’s grassroots struggle for democracy during President Aristide’s second administration in 2001. It recruited medical students from poor families in each of Haiti’s nine departments, with equal numbers of men and women. Talented young people from rural Haiti previously found it nearly impossible to attend medical school. UniFA sought them out, asking only their commitment to return to work in communities throughout Haiti after completing their training. By 2004, 247 medical students were studying medicine at UniFA. A nursing school was planned to open in the fall. The February 29, 2004 coup d’état brought all of this progress to a halt. The faculty and staff were forced into exile or hiding within the country. United Nations and US military forces drove the students off campus, turning the site into military barracks. The campus remained under the control of foreign forces until 2007 when it was officially turned back over to the Aristide Foundation for Democracy.

The university opened with three goals: to prepare doctors to care for the poorest of the poor; to increase the number of doctors practicing in rural areas; and to break down the long tradition of exclusion of the poor majority in Haiti from access to high education. Today, UniFA has expanded its scope to offer degrees in medicine, nursing, dentistry, engineering, law, physical therapy, and continuing education.

From exile in South Africa, a month before his return, President Aristide spoke about education: “Education has been a top priority since the first Lavalas government—of which I was president—was sworn into office on 7 February 1991 (and removed a few months later). More schools were built in the 10 years between 1994, when democracy was restored, and 2004—when Haiti’s democracy was once again violated—than between 1804 to 1994: 195 new primary schools and 104 new public high schools constructed and/or refurbished.” The Aristide government mandated that 20 percent of the national budget be directed to education. For the first time in history, Haiti began to implement a universal schooling program aimed at giving every child an education.

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Aristide reaffirmed that “As I have not ceased to say since 29 February 2004, from exile in Central Africa, Jamaica, and now South Africa, I will return to Haiti to the field I know best and love: education. We can only agree with the words of the great Nelson Mandela, that indeed education is a powerful weapon for changing the world.” UniFA’s graduation is a significant step towards transforming these words into reality. It is a remarkable accomplishment to have been realized in seven years.

While UniFA flourishes, elsewhere in Haiti education is under attack. Successive neo-colonial governments imposed by the United States by means of phony elections have been plagued by widespread corruption, leaving Haiti’s public sector on the brink of paralysis. According to Dr. Aristide, “Like metastatic cancer, institutionalized corruption devours our social fabric, the future of our children, and Haitian youth. The exodus of our young people stems from this cancer.” Nearly one percent of Haiti’s population left the country last year headed for Chile, a mass exodus driven by young people, and especially the rural poor. Many young people who want to attend college leave the country. There are now 54,000 Haitian students attending universities in the Dominican Republic.

Haiti’s former President Michel Martelly, who rose to power with US support, made an empty promise guaranteeing free education funded by a tax on telephone calls and money transfers.
Instead, many teachers haven’t been paid in as many as two years. Where is that money? Teacher strikes are met with growing repression and students from grade school to college join striking teachers to demand the government pay teachers’ salaries. Everyone wonders what happened to the missing $3.8 billion from Venezuela’s Petrocaribe program. Under Petrocaribe, Haiti was supplied with oil at a favorable price with flexible credit. The benefit to Haiti, estimated at approximately $3.8 billion, was intended to combat poverty. All reports indicate that the funds were stolen and misappropriated by the past two governments.

The State University of Haiti closed the schools of Humanities, Law, and Ethnic Studies, due to ongoing strikes and protests. Last fall, police attacked school children with tear gas in Les Cayes, as they supported their teachers’ strike. In the north, last November, hundreds of school children marched to demand, “We don’t want an army; we want education.” The students were saying “No” to the government’s plan to restore the dreaded Haitian military, disbanded by Aristide, which formerly consumed 40 percent of the state budget. They demanded that the money instead be used to pay teachers their long overdue salaries.

UniFA speaks to the urgent need for democratic progress that has been denied Haiti during fourteen years of US/UN military occupation. Failed government promises contrast with the solid achievements of this peoples’ university, highlighting its importance as a living example of democracy in practice. “I like to tell visitors that they are standing on sacred ground,” says Mildred Aristide. She continues, “This is not hyperbole. The stakes and the country’s needs are too high. UniFA is a national project that is slowly revealing itself to be a national institution in the service of the country.”

ENDNOTES

1 http://www.aristidefoundationfordemocracy.org/about/the-university-of-the-aristide-foundation-unifa/
2 http://saintetrinitemusique.wixsite.com/saintetrinitemusique/opst
3 http://lenouvelliste.com/m/public/index.php/article/184820/jean-bertrand-aristide-propose-a-ses-etudiants-de-sarmer-de-la-science-et-de-la-conscience
6 http://www.aristidefoundationfordemocracy.org/about/the-university-of-the-aristide-foundation-unifa/
Venezuela (continued from page 7) 

The rapidly spreading rebellions from Martinique to Barbados were inspired by and aligned with the Haitian revolution and its call for an end to colonialism. Venezuelan Consul General and historian García explains, “[Haiti was] an indisputable reference in the early nineteenth century to all oppressed peoples across Latin America and the Caribbean….Haiti was the Cuba of the 19th century [which] spread solidarity to our country [of Venezuela] as well as the nations of Colombia, Ecuador, Panamá, Bolivia, and Peru, while bearing in mind liberation projects of Cuba, Santo Domingo, and even Mexico.”

One such instance involved African-Indigenous leader José Leonardo Chirino, who orchestrated a maroon rebellion in the Venezuelan Caribbean coastal township of Coro, Falcón in 1795. Venezuelan historians suggest that Chirino frequently travelled to Curacao and Saint Domingue as part of his enslaved work. This led to his exposure to African anti-colonial and abolitionist struggles. While records of who he met and who he may have trained with or received direct material support from are difficult to secure or may not exist, there are clear accounts that after these travels, Chirino launched a rebellion on May 10, 1795 alongside hundreds of enslaved and free blacks as well as the Jirahara, Ajagua, and Caracas Indigenous peoples. Records indicate they launched attacks on Macanillas Hacienda, which spread to El Socorro, Varón, Sabana Redonda, La Magdalena, and haciendas in other regions of Venezuela. It’s still undetermined whether or not Africans from Saint Domingue were directly involved in Chirino’s maroon forces as they were across the Americas from the US South to islands stretched across the Caribbean.

Upon the arrival of Chirino’s forces to the central square of Coro, the criollo slave-owning elites arrested one
hundred black maroons and executed 86 others by firearm. Subsequently, Spanish colonial forces captured Chirino several months later on August 1795. He was publicly executed and dismembered. His wife and children were separated and sold to different haciendas.

For Venezuelans, this African-Indigenous insurrection represents one of the first political movements that voiced the demands of the independence era and chipped away at colonialism’s stronghold in South America. The launch of the rebellion is commemorated every year during Afro-Venezuelan history month. Chirino’s rebellion is one of potentially hundreds more examples where Haitian struggles inspired or accompanied revolutionary acts in Venezuela.

Today, Afro-Venezuelans address the omission of Haiti in their nation’s founding by exploring documented accounts and oral histories of often anonymous Haitian maroon leaders and warriors and their efforts to topple Spanish colonization across Latin America. Haitians’ historical actions solidified the foundations for Venezuela’s future international solidarity efforts, support for Caribbean-wide reparations campaigns, and the establishment of cumbes (societies founded on the principles of self-determination by self-liberated Africans and indigenous people), which continue to exist as revolutionary organizing spaces.

Miranda, Bolivar, and Venezuela’s Unfulfilled Promise to Haiti

The names most often mentioned in official Venezuelan accounts on anti-colonial struggle across the Americas are Europeans and their American-born descendants. In the case of Venezuela, this includes Simón Bolívar and Francisco de Miranda. Both travelled to Haiti seeking refuge, to enrich their ideological vision, and to develop their military might against Spanish colonialism in South America. Perhaps the most pivotal to understanding Venezuela’s complicated relationship with Haiti today can be seen through the lens of Bolivar’s voyages to Haiti.

Bolivar initially sought support from Haiti in 1815, eleven years after the triumph of the Haitian Revolution, after his troops lost to Spanish forces in Cartagenas, present-day Colombia. Southern Haiti’s President Alexandre Pétion provided food and shelter for Bolivar and his company as well as material aid, financial support, and military strength ahead of his upcoming independence battles. Pétion explicitly extended Bolívar solidarity during one of Venezuela’s most dire moments in its independence struggle, on the condition that Bolivar abolish slavery in any territory his forces liberated. According to some scholars, Bolivar departed from Haiti with approximately 4000 rifles, gunpowder, a small fleet, printing press, food, and at least 250 Haitian veterans who fought in the revolutionary wars.

Despite this incredible show of support, after another bout of defeats, Bolivar returned to Haiti to recuperate, re-arm, and regroup. In one of his letters written December 4, 1816 before sailing back to South America, Bolivar etched into historical memory Venezuela’s debt to Haiti: “If men are bound by the favors they have received, be sure, General [Marion], that my countrymen and myself will forever love the Haitian people and the worthy rulers who make them happy.”

On this voyage, after his exchanges in Haiti, Bolivar was victorious in South America. Bolivar along with African and indigenous forces succeeded in liberating Venezuela from Spanish control. The independence forces also freed today’s Brazil, Guayana, Ecuador, Colombia, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Bolivia, northern Peru, and Panama.

Upon this incredible feat, Bolivar declared slavery abolished in these territories and issued the first decree in Venezuela on June 2, 1816. Bolivar himself had already freed enslaved Africans associated with his family’s properties earlier in 1813. However, it wasn’t until thirty-eight years later on March 24, 1854 that slavery was officially abolished in Venezuela, under President José Gregorio Monagas. Despite Bolivar’s greatest efforts, he faced fierce resistance by other slave-owning independence generals and high-level authorities in the new South American republic. Consul Garcia reminds us that even General Miranda stood against abolition and advocated that enslaved Africans serve thirty years in the Venezuelan military before granting their freedom. This contradiction left lasting effects on the relationship between Haiti and Venezuela and speaks volumes to the engrained nature of white supremacist slave economies in the Americas.

Moreover, in addition to the aforementioned delay on abolition, while Bolivar held Pétion and Haiti with the (continued on page 16)
or establish official diplomatic relations once Venezuela became independent. Consul García as well as historical records remind us that this decision was significantly informed by external intimidation from imperialist forces, including the US which feared the implications of recognizing the Black Republic. Haiti represented to the US and its colonial allies—and what they have declared Venezuela since 2015—“an unusual and extraordinary threat to [US] national security.”

Perhaps a strategic decision, yet undoubtedly one that undermined Haiti’s unwavering commitment to regional liberation, Bolívar also excluded Haiti from the first regional gathering of independent states in the Americas—the Congress of the American States in Panama in 1826. Today, we find Venezuela facing the similar exclusion at the hands of OAS Secretary General Luis Almagro and the Lima Group, namely rightwing states from Latin America and the Caribbean in alignment with the US, calling for intervention in Venezuela’s domestic affairs. Overwhelmingly, however, progressive states have stood beside Venezuela in these trying times.

Bolivar’s unfortunate decision to omit Haiti played a role in the French and US’s racist counter-revolutionary backlash against the nation that persist to this day. France devastated the Haitian economy, demanding financial restitution for sugar industry losses after the Revolution, further exposing the French state’s racist notions concerning their control over African life. Threatening military intervention and surrounding the island, Haiti paid France 150 million gold francs, the equivalent of $22 billion in gold, lumber, and other resources until 1947, underdeveloping its infrastructure—as we have witnessed occur with other majority African and indigenous nations.

**THE ANECDOTE: WE MUST CENTER BLACK INTERNATIONALISM AND REPARATIONS**

These histories touch the surface of what we need to know to understand the layers involved in Venezuela and Haiti’s contemporary relationship and the dilemmas they face together and independently at this present conjuncture.

How does Venezuela return the historical, moral, political, material, and spiritual “debt” of Haiti’s hand in its independence? And how do Venezuelans repair harms caused by the decisions their founding leaders made in the 19th century? What measures can be taken by Venezuelan grassroots movements to demand that the Bolivarian Revolution also responds to concerns raised in light of cases like the Haitian Government’s mismanagement and corruption of PetroCaribe funds? How can Venezuelans stand in solidarity with Haiti’s majority poor? And how can Venezuelans’ actions and strategic interventions to rectify these contradictions serve as examples for grassroots movements around the world?

Haiti’s deeply abolitionist, black internationalist, and pan-Africanist solidarity model were critical and necessary to defeat occupying colonial forces in South America. Given this, it is critical that Venezuela, as a majority black nation, as well as other black nations and those around the world fighting for liberation, study Haiti’s historical internationalism and commit their struggles to active solidarity now with the Haitian people.

Our solidarity must follow earlier models of anti-colonial struggles as manifested in Haiti’s example as well as the Cuban revolutionary model which has transformed over time, from direct military support in anti-colonial struggles in Africa and internationally, to present-day medical training for youth from majority poor nations. Our revolutionary work with Haiti should emerge in our collective efforts to accompany the people’s grassroots movement and inherited revolutionary process: Fanmi Lavalas.

The Bolivarian Revolution should be directly tied to the Haitian grassroots movement. There are historical and, at present, intentional imperialist reasons intervening and preventing this relationship from taking shape. However, ensuring that this relationship flourishes would encourage steps toward a reparatory approach to this historical debt. The Bolivarian Revolution is facing the same global confusion campaign, media smear tactics, economic strangulation, and racist attacks—not only experienced by Chile’s Salvador Allende—but also experienced by Fanmi Lavalas. There are countless lessons to learn and share between these two nations which will contribute to all our movements moving forward.

Until such a black internationalist relationship is forged, we will continue to witness inefficient, unsatisfactory, and contradictory results in the solidarity model Venezuela and other international movements apply to Haiti.

**ENDNOTES**


2 Oscar López Rivera, “Puerto Rico: Decolonization, Hurricanes and Solidarity” (presentation, Oldenburg Center lecture series at Pomona College, Claremont, CA, February 8, 2018).

3 Jesús “Chucho” García (Consul General of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela in New Orleans, Louisiana) in discussion


11 Horne, 14.

12 At the First Ecosocialist International which took place in the Cumbe of Veroes, in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on October 31st - November 3rd, 2017, they define cumbe as “a territory of resistance dedicated to an inter-cultural way of life; a form of organization, production and insurgency pioneered by maroons, who escaped slavery and built alternative societies based on ancestral principles of solidarity and reciprocity and not on competition.”


14 Ibid.


16 Upon victory, Bolivar wrote to Petition that, “In my proclamation to the inhabitants of Venezuela and in the decrees, I have to issue concerning the slaves, I do not know if I am allowed to express the feelings of my heart to your Excellency and to leave to posterity an everlasting token of your philanthropy. I do not know, I say, if I must declare that you are the author of our liberty.”


18 García, December 2017.

19 El Libertador: Writings of Simon Bolivar edited by David Bushell and translated by Frederick H. Fornoff, as well as Haiti, Her Story respectively document that Bolivar also referenced Haiti’s governmental structure in new South American liberated territories. Similarly, Bolivar drew on the Haitian Constitution for Haiti’s governmental structure in new South American liberated territories. Similarly, Bolivar drew on the Haitian Constitution for Haitian Revolution, and the Origins of the Dominican Republic.

20 Chery, 2014.


22 In Haiti, Her History and Her Detractors, Leger references A Century of American Diplomacy stating that “The debates in the ‘Congress of the US were of a most acrimonious character,’ and were conducted upon domestic party lines, the opponents of the Administration almost unanimously voting against the mission. The two strong points of opposition were, first the objection to no alliance, especially an armed one, with any other nations; and, second, ‘the recognition of the negro Republic of Haiti which opened up the slavery question.’”


Puerto Rico
(continued from page 9)

People have to work and have to have housing, but unemployment is staggeringly high, and so much housing has been destroyed. Over 135,000 have left, many going to Florida and Texas. It’s only going to get worse.

The same has happened in Haiti. Since the earthquake and devastating hurricanes, Haitians have been forced to flee in massive numbers to destinations such as Brazil, Chile, and now Argentina, where their labor is exploited. Similar to blaming Puerto Ricans, Donald Trump has issued racist statements against the robbed Haitian population and terminated Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for the beneficiaries forced out of Haiti and now living in the US.

Education

The economic crisis was already pushing Governor Rossello to privatize all aspects of public life. This includes education. Already last winter, Rossello planned to close over 300 schools. One-hundred-fifty have been closed already, with more on the way. Rossello and Education Secretary Betsy DeVos have a plan to extensively privatize the schools. They want to bring in charter school companies, for which there is little oversight, and provide vouchers for private schools. There has been pushback from teachers’ unions and educators, but at this point it looks like the plan will go through, if not in totality, then in a smaller initial trial run, resulting in more and more school shutdowns.

Many schools are still operating without full power, and school districts with large Puerto Rican populations in the US are jumping in to help. One example is a school in Paterson, New Jersey which is providing resources and delegations to Barranquitas—the hometown of one of its teachers. However, it all comes with a twist. New Jersey has a shortage of bilingual teachers, so one of the goals of these delegations is to recruit teachers away from the island and into New Jersey school districts.

As one school official stated, “The disaster relief effort presented an opportunity for the district to conduct its recruiting more directly. It’s not just a matter of adopting a school in Puerto Rico, we want to create a pipeline of educators.”

The Puerto Rican Community Responds

The hurricane has also sparked solidarity and activism among communities and community organizers, both in Puerto Rico and throughout the diaspora.

Jose Lopez, director of the Puerto Rican Cultural Cen-
ter in Chicago, put it this way: “There is an awakening of the Puerto Rican diaspora—more than I have ever seen. People are chipping in as never before. In Chicago we have sent three planeloads with direct food and medical supplies. Communities have raised money for micro grants; we’re helping to rebuild institutions. There is a growing symbiosis.”

This sentiment was echoed by Silvia Torres, a Bay Area activist. “We have always seen ourselves as Puerto Ricans, with close family ties to the island, but now we are being integrated as never before. We know it’s our responsibility to help.”

When Oscar Lopez Rivera visited California in May 2017, he talked about the goal of Puerto Rican self-actualization: “Now that the hurricane is forcing us to be more self-reliant, there are great possibilities to create something new. Unity is being forged among forces who hitherto might have had differences that kept them apart.”

Days after the hurricane, people from all over the island began to build “Mutual Support Centers” (Centros de Apoyo Mutuo), coming together to rebuild their island and to make it self-sufficient. Soup kitchens and new buildings began to spring up. Communities are not only creating communal and cooperative agriculture but are rethinking how public spaces will be organized for cooperation for the future. There are over twenty such centers throughout the island, and there are plans for them to come together in a kind of consortium.

Young engineering and medical students whose schools are still not fully operational are going to rural areas and are partnering with environmentalists to develop new forms of agriculture, such as hydroponics. They are also working on more traditional forms of agriculture as well exploring new forms of energy.

Although Puerto Rico is a perfect place for both solar and wind energy, the rebuilding of the grid is not relying on them. Both of these, however, are within people’s means, being both accessible and cheap, so municipalities are pressuring the central government to use them. Solar energy in particular is the perfect vehicle for providing energy to both cities and rural areas.

It is clear that being part of the US is no guarantee of getting real Federal relief. People can just look at the examples of the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and, more recently, what is happening in Houston as the result of Hurricane Harvey. For Puerto Rico it is starker. Statehood for Puerto Rico is losing ground as an option.

In this era of extreme climate change, resulting in increasing natural disasters, Puerto Rico, Haiti, and the rest of the Caribbean will continue to be hit hard. June 1 is designated as this year’s official start of the hurricane sea-
Renew TPS
(continued from page 20)

MASS KILLING BY HAITIAN POLICE IN PORT-AU-PRINCE

Compounding the above challenges is the ongoing political crisis in the country since the bloody 2004 coup d’état against the democratic government of President Aristide. Almost daily, demonstrations break out in cities and towns against the government of Jovenel Moise, increasingly seen as being totally corrupt by a large segment of the population inside Haiti and in the diaspora. Peaceful protests of the government’s abusive extortion practices of women and other small retailers, motorists and transportation workers are met with brutal repression by the police that too frequently result in death or serious injuries.

Sweatshop workers striking for higher wages, teachers owed months of unpaid salaries, and students protesting the lack of educational material are similarly beaten and brutalized either in the streets or in filthy, overcrowded jails, with most having no access to a judge for years. To many, these increasingly frequent killings, arbitrary arrests, and deadly acts by government security forces recreate the impunity that characterized the Duvalier years.

The estimated 59,000 TPS recipients provide a major source of support for their families and network of relatives. The remittances keep their dependents in Haiti alive and local economies afloat. Repatriation will result in family break up and deprive former TPS recipients, now returnees, and their dependents of the means to live.

The conservative statistics below are alarming even as other reports claim higher numbers. Though Hurricanes Irma and Maria did not hit Haiti directly, the heavy rains and strong winds caused great damage to houses and the local agriculture in northern Haiti. These and Hurricane Matthew that struck the south in 2016 compounded the massive devastation of the earthquake, from which Haiti has yet to recover. The situation in Haiti is dire according to a report by the Global Justice Clinic of NYU School of Law.1

- Hurricane Matthew displaced 180,000 people, destroyed 104,000 houses, and damaged an additional 133,000, affecting the well-being of more than two million people. Housing loss and damage totaled $856 million. The hurricane destroyed or damaged 133 hospitals, clinics, and health posts and affected 1,670 schools. People have not received sufficient aid to rebuild their homes, farms, and businesses. A severe hunger crisis is spreading in that area, and people are migrating to Port-au-Prince to live with family, in order to survive.
  - Hurricane Matthew killed 350,000 farm animals.
  - Two-hundred-thousand people live in Canaan, a makeshift settlement created after the earthquake, without drinking water or sanitation.
  - Thirty-thousand new cholera cases were projected to develop in 2017. Cholera has killed 10,000 people and sickened 815,000. Some reports conclude almost 15,000 dead.
  - Sixty percent of the population live on less than $2 a day. One in four lives on less than one dollar a day. Haiti is the most food insecure nation in the Western Hemisphere, according to the Global Hunger Index.
  - Twenty-two percent of Haitians face food insecurity. Half of Haitians are undernourished.
  - Haiti imports more than half its food, including 80 percent of its rice—and prices keep rising.

The income from TPS recipients and other Haitian immigrants plays a vital role in Haiti’s recovery, by providing economic support for friends and relatives back home. The resources they regularly send are reliable, received directly, and put to good use by community residents striving to rebuild their lives. Similar situations exist for other countries that are also striving to recover from wars, natural and human-made disasters, and who do not have the capacity to repatriate tens of thousands of people. We call for the passage of inclusive legislation that benefits the broader immigrant community, which allows DACA and TPS recipients to stay, and gives them a path to permanent residency and citizenship. *

The lessons already learned by the popular movements in both places will be invaluable as this crisis deepens. The resistance and organization of the Puerto Rican and Haitian people—and the solidarity that they receive—will have a great impact on the outcome. *

Puerto Rico
(continued from page 18)

The lessons already learned by the popular movements in both places will be invaluable as this crisis deepens. The resistance and organization of the Puerto Rican and Haitian people—and the solidarity that they receive—will have a great impact on the outcome. *

ENDNOTES
3 https://www.opendemocracy.net/matt-kennard/haiti-and-shock-doctrine
In solidarity with the people of Haiti and their struggle for sovereignty and justice, Haiti Action Committee adds its voice to denounce the decision by the Trump Administration to end Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for an estimated 59,000 Haitians. As we witness the implementation of a previously announced anti-immigrant agenda, we stand in solidarity with TPS and DACA recipients as well as all refugees and immigrants under attack. It is time for the passage of legislation, such as HR 4253 and S 2144 or other alternatives, that is inclusive and beneficial for the broader immigrant community, which allows DACA and TPS recipients to stay, and gives them a path to permanent legal status.

The Immigration Act of 1990 created TPS to benefit people unable to return safely to their home country because of ongoing armed conflict, environmental disaster, or other extraordinary and temporary conditions. Haiti received TPS after the earthquake of 2010. Thirteen countries had TPS status when Trump came to power. His administration ended the programs for Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone in April; Nicaragua and Haiti in November 2017; El Salvador in January 2018; and Honduras in May 2018. Haitian recipients of TPS have until July 22, 2019 to leave the US. Including TPS Haitians, their US-born children, and spouses, Haiti could face the return of up to 200,000 people.

It is outrageous that the Trump administration has ended TPS for Haitians, given the dire country conditions that make TPS renewal such an absolute necessity. Members of Haiti Action Committee, an organization that works in solidarity with grassroots organizations, frequently visit Haiti. We are appalled at the unchanging miserable conditions—the lack of basic services including clean drinking water, sanitation, and health care. The very, very slow process of recovery from hurricanes and the earthquake has negatively impacted the health and well-being of the population. The basic needs of the majority population are not being met. Returning 200,000 people to Haiti unconscionably exposes them to these conditions and will greatly exacerbate the present crisis.

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