

Haiti earthquake relief funds unaccounted for amid pervasive human misery

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Raymond Joseph, a former Haitian representative to the Organization of American States and Haiti's ambassador to the United States at the time of the devastating 2010 earthquake, recently declared on Bloomberg TV's "Money Makers" program that "we don't know where the money has gone." Joseph was referring to the billions of dollars in foreign aid—including \$4 billion pledged by the United States—for earthquake relief in Haiti.

Indeed, the question of "where the money has gone" is difficult to research. A December 29, 2014 US State Department fact sheet gives some hints: paying for "innovative ways" for "private sector developers to improve and expand the housing stock," and paying to expand port facilities in the northern city of Cap-Haitien. The latter will be a boondoggle for manufacturing and cruise ship corporations.

However, an April 2013 report by the Center For Economic and Policy Research, titled "Breaking Open the Black Box," states that the organization filed multiple Freedom of Information Act Requests with USAID asking where the money went, and received only "heavily redacted documents, which exempt disclosure of any financial information as 'proprietary.'"

Former US President Bill Clinton has refused to submit a final report on disbursements from the Interim Haiti Reconstruction Commission, through which most funds from foreign governments were funneled. The refusal came in response to a suit filed before Haiti's Superior Court of Auditors and Administrative Disputes by two lawyers, Newton Louis St Juste and André Michel.

The IHRC, which Clinton co-chaired with then-Prime Minister Jean-Max Bellerive, closed down after only 18 months. Its official French-language web site

(www.cirh.ht) now offers advice on home mortgages.

Marking the anniversary of the earthquake, Haitian-Americans staged a small but angry protest outside the offices of the Clinton Foundation in New York City's Harlem, carrying handmade signs. One read, "Bill Clinton, where is the money," and another consisted of a photograph of former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton with Haiti's current Duvalierist president, Michel Martelly with the caption, "US puppet: Hillary's choice poison for democracy in Haiti."

Amidst the secrecy over the missing aid, though, one thing is clear: the money did not benefit hundreds of thousands of Haitians who are still living in tents, homeless camps and corrugated sheds in and around the capital, Port-au-Prince.

On January 8, Amnesty International published a report titled "'15 minutes to leave': Denial of the right to adequate housing in post-quake Haiti." It describes forced evictions from homeless camps and other makeshift settlements along with conditions in the remaining camps. More than 85,000 people are still living in approximately 120 camps that were among the more than 1,500 that sprang up after the earthquake five years ago. "Conditions in many IDP [internally displaced persons] camps are dire," Amnesty writes, noting that one-third of those 85,000 people do not have access to a latrine.

Malnutrition rates in the remaining camps are "beyond emergency thresholds," and cholera cases soared at the beginning of 2014 even when they were dropping in other parts of the country. The earthquake caused moderate damage requiring structural repairs in 94,000 residential buildings. More than 71,000 residential buildings were left beyond repair.

The Haitian government boasts about the fact that nearly 95 percent of the people who were in camps in

Port-au-Prince the summer after the earthquake have been relocated. However, tens if not hundreds of thousands of them have moved to an area called Canaan; while not officially a camp, its conditions are not much better. It is a large and semi-arid area along the coast just north of Port-au-Prince, which was uninhabited until after the earthquake. At least 200,000 people have since moved to the area; although not all are IDPs from the post-earthquake camps, this exodus is part of the reason that the population in the camps has dropped over the past five years.

In April 2010, the government declared Canaan an “area of public utility,” seemingly opening it to development. However, no governmental provision was made for roads, schools, running water or electricity. Instead, writes Amnesty, residents of Canaan have organized themselves to deal with water, waste, churches and schools, with only empty promises from the Haitian government and USAID.

In preparing its report, Amnesty visited seven camps in the existing Port-au-Prince neighborhoods of Christ-Roi, Carrefour, Delmas 33, Tabarre/Delmas and Turgeau, along with various “sectors” in Canaan. In the process, the organization documented numerous stories of forced evictions of earthquake refugees from homeless camps.

Legally, Amnesty writes, evictions can happen only “when appropriate procedural protections are in place. These include genuine consultation with those affected to identify all feasible alternatives to evictions, provision of adequate notice, access to legal remedies, compensation and alternative housing for those who cannot provide it for themselves.” These practices are codified in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the American Convention on Human Rights.

A selection of the stories subsequently documented in the report shows the disdain for such rights shown by local elites.

On January 11, 2014, for example, three people—including two young children—were killed in a fire that tore through the camp of the Comité du Peuple Progressiste. The shelters and personal belongings of all 108 families in the camp were destroyed. The alleged landowner had threatened camp residents with eviction, including in the company of security guards and police.

In December 2013, in the Canaan sector called Mozayik, a justice of the peace was accompanied by police and armed men who fired shots in the air along with tear gas grenades. A woman who was four months pregnant suffered injuries. On the morning of January 30, 2014, the same justice of the peace returned with police and men armed with machetes. A four-year-old child and an 84-year-old man were reported injured.

In June 2013, Camp Bristou in Pétion-Ville was cleared with no forewarning and no court papers presented. In testimony after the eviction, a resident said that “the municipal officials tore IDPs’ mattresses and set them on fire. They stopped residents from taking their personal belongings with them. There was a truck collecting all remaining possessions in order to throw them away.”

Forced evictions are not the only government tactic being used against people who remain in camps. In many cases the government has offered rental subsidies—made to look generous at US \$500 per year. Amnesty, however, quotes a survey showing that 60 percent of recipients didn’t think they would be able to afford their new home after the subsidy ended, and 75 percent who had moved when their subsidy ended were “living in declining standards of accommodation.”

In October 2013 the Haitian government issued a National Policy on Housing and Habitat. The policy document is long on generalities and promises to better implement bourgeois property relations in the housing sector. It is not shy about referencing legal frameworks—including a 1982 document titled The Consistent Policy on Land Planning—that date from the Duvalier era. As Amnesty notes in its report, the National Policy does not even acknowledge that forced evictions are taking place.

The fundamental right to decent and affordable housing is being systematically denied to large sections of the working class in Haiti by a government that is fully backed by both Washington and international finance capital.



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