

Six months after Hurricane Matthew, hunger and desperation grip Haiti's south

John Marion
1 April 2017

Nearly six months after Hurricane Matthew devastated Haiti's Grand'Anse, Nippes, and Sud departments, hunger and desperation are pervasive. There have been multiple reports of people eating poisonous plants or tree bark just to stave off hunger, and in the city of Jérémie people are still living under tarpaulins sent by USAID after the storm.

According to *Le Nouvelliste*, an elderly couple in the town of Candache hanged themselves because of hunger. Jean-Claude Fignolé, a writer and member of the Board of Christian aid group Food for the Poor, told the web site that "there is a level of distress that words can't express." Benoit Jean Guerrier, the parliamentary deputy from Moron/Chambellan, has voiced a fear of food riots.

While Jovenel Moïse, the protégé of former President Michel Martelly, won a majority (55 percent) in the November 20 presidential election and thereby avoided a runoff, only 20 percent of eligible voters turned out nationwide. Having received only 600,000 votes in a country of nearly 11 million people, Moïse and his allies in the ruling elite are aware of the precariousness of their position.

On March 22, Food for the Poor found 240 people, including 84 women and 62 children, living in a cave near Jérémie in Grand'Anse. The President and CEO of the organization told the *Miami Herald* that "they have no food. They have no water. They have no shelter. It really is a crime against humanity."

Aside from the *Miami Herald*, whose coverage was picked up by *Haiti-Libre*, Radio Television Caraïbes, and other French-language outlets, the American press has been silent about the conditions facing those found in the cave.

After visiting Jérémie last week, the vice president of another NGO told *Herald* that "I don't want to say that there could be mass starvation right away, but we could start to see 10, 20, and 30 people at a time dying."

A March report from the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) estimates that of the 2.1 million Haitians affected by the hurricane last October, 1.4 million still don't have enough food or safe drinking water. Educational resources for more than 300,000 children are lacking, and more than half a million people don't have adequate shelter.

Shortly after the storm, UN Special Adviser David Nabarro demonstrated the callousness of the organization's approach, saying during a visit that "so many excellent things are already happening ... as the people themselves are hard at work, readjusting their lives so they are protected from the elements."

Three months later, at the beginning of January, Oxfam reported that 80 percent of crops which would have normally been harvested in January and February in the Sud and Grand'Anse departments were destroyed by the storm.

The Haitian government has estimated a total of US \$2.9 billion in losses to crops, livestock, houses, and infrastructure from Matthew. OCHA is seeking to raise less than \$300 million this year for humanitarian aid in Haiti, of which only 13.2 percent had been received as of this writing. The United States has contributed a measly \$16.9 million. The Haitian gourde has been depreciating rapidly against the dollar, making this level of "aid" even more insulting.

MINUSTAH, the UN police and military force which has been used to suppress dissent since the 2004 coup against Jean-Bertrand Aristide, has a budget of nearly \$350 million for the year ending June 30, 2017.

The Haitian government budgeted 10.7 billion gourdes (US\$152,700,000 at the current exchange rate) for its Ministry of Justice and Public Security, which includes the National Police of Haiti, in the fiscal year ending September 30, 2017; a further 11.6 billion gourdes were budgeted for paying off government debt. The Ministry of

Public Health and Population received only 5.5 billion gourdes, while Agriculture, Natural Resources and Rural Development received slightly more than 7 billion.

18.3 billion was allotted for the Ministry of Public Works, Transportation, and Communications in a budget that was decided before Matthew devastated the infrastructure in much of the south.

The gourde is falling rapidly against the dollar, while government revenues from a PetroCaribe agreement with Venezuela are unsteady because of world oil prices. Haitian government attempts to increase revenues by charging more for gasoline provoked protests in Port-au-Prince in February 2015.

Having developed the National Police of Haiti (PNH) to their satisfaction, the United States and UN are planning to end the MINUSTAH mission—which is widely hated for its history repression, sexual crimes and for causing the cholera epidemic—and let the PNH suppress domestic opposition. Coming out of his first working meeting with the heads of the police and army on March 28, Moïse’s Prime Minister Jack Guy Lafontant emphasized to the press that private property and investments will be protected but that specific plans are being kept secret.

In an article headlined “Private Sector Receives Assurances ahead of Final Election Results,” the *Haiti Sentinel* reported in December about a meeting between interim President Jocelerme Privert and members of the Economic Forum of the Private Sector and the Association of Haitian Industries (ADIH).

Georges Sassine, the president of ADIH, said afterward that “we came out of the meeting with the feeling that we are on the same wavelength with the executive ... we have put all that we have in the balance so that the process succeeds.”

After the confirmation of Moïse’s election, the Forum issued a statement offering to “put itself from here on out at the disposition of the President and his collaborators.”



To contact the WSW and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact