



What on Earth is going on in Haiti?

Haitian politics are complicated. To clarify the situation somewhat I am quoting from a friend of mine: The current President, Jovenal Moïse, took office on February 7th 2017, for a 5-year term, but the last presidential elections took place in 2015. The elections were contested, which is usually the case in Haiti. Because there were trust issues with the outgoing Martelly government in charge of holding those elections, and for issues that are similar to the ones the current administration is facing, it was decided that a provisional government should be in charge of the redo to take place within a year. Less than 20% of eligible voters took part in the redo and Moïse was declared the winner in the fall of 2016. He then took office on February 7th, 2017, which is one year later than the constitutionally recognized date of February 7th, 2016.

Think of it this way: The Haitian Constitution recognizes the end of an administration and the beginning of a new one, on February 7th, every 5 years from the first democratic administration starting in 1991 ('91, '96, '01, '06, '11, '16, '21...). **If there is a provisional government for some reason, the Constitution recognizes that period as a part of the incoming administration's term.**

When ironically, Aristide, the very first democratically elected leader of Haiti was overthrown through a coup d'état in 1991 and spent 3 years in exile before being returned to power, he asked if that meant he would get to add 3 more years to his term, this was quickly rejected. He still gave up power on February 7th, 1996, as per the Constitution.

Elections in Haiti are used as political ploys by governments to set up the field so their party could win. Parliamentary elections were supposed to be held by Moïse in the fall of 2019, and he failed to do so. Senators assumed they would get to stay in power until those elections took place. Instead, Moïse dismissed 2/3 of Parliament when their terms ended and has been ruling by decree since. The reason given: He was respecting the same article of the Haitian Constitution that he now refuses to apply for himself.

The Moïse government has been violating the Haitian Constitution for years now. When a Haitian court released a report accusing the government of embezzling billions of dollars of PetroCaribe Fund, the government responded by limiting their powers to investigate. When human rights organizations accused the government of using gangs to commit massacres in anti-government popular neighborhoods, they responded by simply ignoring those accusations. When Haitians citizens protested the rising insecurity issues due to daily kidnappings by those gangs, the government responded violently to stop the protests, while at times ignoring those same gangs parading a few blocks away.

The big international players like the OAS, the UN and The US seem to side with Moïse to say that his term ends on February 7th, 2022 and not in 2021 as every Haitian Constitutionalist and the Courts have stated. This approval is essentially giving the Haitian government the green light to do as they please. This week alone, Moïse has arrested or forced into early retirement the Supreme Court judges who are next in line to take over as President. He still claims "Je ne suis pas un dictateur!"

In spite of the dire current political situation, Haitians have maintained their sense of humor. As a result of Moïse arresting 20 people last weekend and claiming they were plotting a coup d'état against him, and presenting photo evidence of a few knives, a few machetes, 5 guns/long guns, and a condom (no joke!) as proof his life was in serious danger. But while his life is not seriously endangered, the people of Haiti are suffering. The continuing insecurity impacting every facet of the population is traumatizing everybody, regardless of age or economic condition. The people deserve better. Jovenal Moïse, while still in power, actually has no power left, everything is at standstill. The opposition has named another president, but most people in Haiti do not take that very seriously. In the meantime, what is the way forward, not for the politicians, but for the Haitian people? As they say, bondye konnen (the good Lord knows).

For Haiti,
Renate

Microcredit Seed Money Helps Create Successful Store in Latibolye



Haitian Connection is supporting a micro finance effort in Latibolye. Esther Jacques is managing a community store in that community and is managing it. She has been able to make it profitable. Seed money was provided by Haitian Connection, and it now stands on its own. So proud of this venture.



Pilot Project Expands Opportunities for Women



A pilot project is in the works with one group of 5 women. These women are already part of Haitian Connection in the cash without condition program. We will start with one group and see how it works. Each of the 5 women in the group will be given 2 chickens. These are egg producing chickens and will provide the women

with some income as well as with extra protein for their kids. In other words, they are able to improve their children's nutrition. We are purchasing the chickens in Jérémie, (in other words, locally,) and supporting a local businessman who started a business selling chickens. More about this in the next newsletter.



Cash Without Condition Participants Receive Christmas Bonus



Haitian Connection is continuing its work in 2021. One of the programs we again will sponsor is the cash without condition program. The women we are supporting are holding the envelop with their Christmas bonus, thanks to Fr. Pat Gaza who so generously contributed to this effort. This

program is helping the women with food, sending their kids to school, and also provides them the possibility of putting a little money aside for special project, like starting a micro business. The women are from Deschamps and Torbek Terre Rouge.

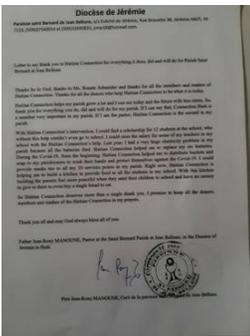


After School Program in Jérémie Helps Students Succeed



Haitian Connection's after school program is proceeding well. All the kids participating received their first term grade report, and all of them did well and passed. We are so happy for them. It is vitally important for them to have a place to go after school and have a quiet study space that reinforces what they have learned in school.

A Letter from One of Our Partners



This is an official thank you letter to Haitian Connection from the pastor of St. Bernard school in Jean Bellune. Rev. Jean-Rony is one of our important partners in the Grand'Anse. We have a very active partnership for the school, scholarships and salaries for the teachers and now the construction of the kitchen. We also provided PPEs for the parish and the community and helped provide food for those in needs as well as work with Trees That Feed Foundation to provide konparets for all the school children. We are happy to have such reliable partners.

Book Corner

Picture the Nations: Haiti

This beautifully done picture book was created by Picture the Nations, whose photography team of six traveled all around Haiti to capture as much of the country as possible, representing all of the unique aspects of life for Haitian people. The team brought along portable photo printers, so that rather than taking photos, they could give them. Haitians have long been exploited by photography that seeks to sensationalize and strip dignity away in the face of the chaos left behind by both natural and systemic disasters. Picture the Nations does photography differently. When you make a \$50 donation and acquire this book, you remind the world of the immense wealth of beauty, tradition, grit, and generosity of the Haitian people.



<https://picturethenations.org/donate/>

Building Project at St. Bernard de Clairvaux, Part 1

Haitian Connection is engaged in a new project in collaboration with our partner in Jean Bellune. The school St. Bernard de Clairvaux qualified for a state food program for its 500 students, but had no facility to cook and prepare the food on a daily basis. Haitian Connection is building a kitchen facility right next to the school, with water hook up, and planned counter space and oven. In these photos, the foundation was completed, as well as the water hook up, and were waiting for the bricks to be delivered. This is a great project that will benefit the children of Jean Bellune for many years.



Building Project at St. Bernard de Clairvaux, Part 2



The next group of photos show construction progress on the kitchen facility. The walls are going up, water pipes and a cistern have been placed. It is great to see this kind of progress, and let's not forget: the beneficiaries are the 500 school children at the school. In addition, this type of project gives local people work and brings money into the community.



Building Project at St. Bernard de Clairvaux, Part 3

More kitchen progress: counters have been installed for food preparation and sinks are also installed with connection to a water cistern. Once the roof is up, cooking can begin in earnest.



Scholarship Students Continue to Excel

Haitian Connection is continuing its scholarship program now that the new school year has started (November 9). Amitaynah is a new student who we are supporting. She is going into 3rd grade and has been first in her class for all of her years in school so far. Her parents are unable to pay the school fees, so Haitian Connection is helping out. We will feature more of our scholarship students in the next few weeks. Thanks to all who are making this possible.



My Turn: How these recent events are reminiscent of my early years

By YVES SALOMON-FERNÁNDEZ



I was born in Haiti, where I spent the first 12 years of my life. I grew up in a place where political instability was the norm. As children, my brothers and I missed many days of schools due to civil unrest, coup d'états and political violence. Between 1986, when the Baby Doc régime ended, and 1991 when I left the country, Haiti had seven presidents. Haiti is also a place with strong pockets that believe in democracy, as fleeting as it may be for the small island. People risked their lives to go vote in elections. The values of voting and respect for democracy were strongly espoused in my family, even if unattainable on the island.

I remember vividly when I was about 9, my dad picked me up second from school after getting my brother, who is two years younger than me. We boarded a *tap-tap*, a pick-up truck turned paid transport vehicle, from my school in downtown Port-au-Prince to go home where it was quieter. By that, I mean that things were not on fire yet. Things were hot all over the capital city, but downtown was literally on fire. There were barricades everywhere. The *tap-tap* driver worked hard to navigate them and the burning tires that anti-government groups had set up to complement the official barricades. The streets were literally on fire and people were throwing rocks at everything, including our truck. We were all was scared, but eventually made it home safely.

Watching the riot mobs storm Washington, D.C., our own American capital city, and interrupt the certification in the House of Representatives with their flags reminded me so much of Haiti. I wondered what has the United States come to? It was surreal and so reminiscent of my experiences growing up in the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. My sentiments on Wednesday afternoon were so different from those I felt in the morning.

I woke up on Jan. 6 thinking that perhaps 2021 will bring the solace that we need as a nation for all of the suffering and pain that we experienced in 2020. Politically, we made history in Georgia and we had our first Black woman to be installed as vice president later this month. I was feeling hopeful, but all of that changed by the afternoon.

As a leader, I know too well that change brings resistance. To achieve equity, we must all give something of value to make this ideal a reality. It's hard when one has lived in a system of near complete hegemony by one group to suddenly watch as things are becoming more fair. I get it. What was hard to watch, as a person of color, a black woman and mother of a brown boy were the selfies. They were unbelievable!

What our nation needs now is healing. We are one nation. Let us realize that when one suffers, we all suffer. Let us look ahead to realize that a stronger nation is a more prosperous one. Let us realize that respect for human life and human dignity should be afforded to all, not some. Let us make that Pledge of Allegiance mean something for the young people that recite it every day in school.

Yves Salomon-Fernández Ph.D. is the president of Greenfield Community College.

Haitian Connection

Haitian Connection is a 501(c) (3) tax exempt organization founded in 2005, which focuses on the needs of women, children and young adults in the Jérémie region of southwest Haiti. A variety of projects have already touched thousands of lives: houses have been built for more than 97 women and their children; a small microcredit program is providing economic opportunity for women in 2 communities; a potable water initiative is giving healthy water to one thousand families; and local school teachers have received training in the Child-to-Child method. Haitian Connection's Divergent Thinking Institute is providing Divergent Thinking seminars all over Haiti.

As a response to the earthquake in January 2010, and its psychological aftermath, Haitian Connection has established a mental health program in Jérémie to provide counseling as people resettle, tally their losses and adjust to a new reality. 27 members of the community have been trained in psychological first aid. This served the greater Jérémie area well after Hurricane Matthew in October of 2016. Our mental health agents were able to hold community meetings to give people an opportunity to debrief and receive some training in stress reduction techniques.

Support Us

Haitian Connection is a 501(c) (3) nonprofit corporation registered in Illinois and your gifts are tax deductible. Our projects depend on volunteers and the financial support of people who desire to help.

The cost of building a home for a woman and her family in Jérémie is \$2,000. The houses have three rooms and a latrine. You could contribute to a house, or even get your church/organization to sponsor a whole house. After Hurricane Matthew, this has become a priority for people in the region.

Scholarships for needy students from elementary to secondary schools.

Microcredit group: contributions accepted.

Mental Health Program: contributions to mental health center accepted (total cost for one year \$10,000)

Support for training programs in Divergent Thinking, mental health, Child-to-Child, and continuing education. For every program for 25 people we provide a meal for all participants and give the facilitators a stipend (about \$500 per training).

To support our projects financially, donate online by visiting our website at: www.HaitianConnection.org and clicking on the PayPal button.

If you would prefer to send your donation by mail, please address checks to: **Haitian Connection**
5300 South Shore Drive # 27
Chicago, IL 60615

When you order from Amazon.com, giving to Haitian Connection is easy! Simply go to <https://smile.amazon.com/> to get started!

Get Involved

We are looking for volunteers: English teachers, educators, specialists in various fields to give short conferences or seminars.

To volunteer, contact **Renate Schneider** at haitianconnection@gmail.com or by phone at **312/493-3719**; in Haiti: **011/509/3 463-7532**

