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# UNION VIEW

ITUC International Trade Union Confederation  
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→Alice Smeets

## Reconstruction in Haiti: The urgency of decent work

For the trade unions, the reconstruction efforts in Haiti must also respond to the abysmal lack of decent work and social protection in Haiti. In conditions of extreme poverty, reports from the emergency camps and the export factories. A focus on the children trapped by a lack of education and victims of exploitation.

# Genuine reconstruction is impossible without decent work

Haiti was already beset by a social catastrophe before the devastating earthquake. Ensuring decent work is therefore crucial in the reconstruction of the country.

Carlos Renodin is an outgoing young person who deserves to have a brilliant career ahead of him. He is a computer science graduate, speaks four languages fluently, and has a natural talent for drawing. In spite of these skills, he has lost all hope of ever finding a decent job. They no longer exist in his country, which is, as it is often said, *"the poorest nation in the Western hemisphere"*.

The earthquake of 12 January 2010 destroyed Renodin's house, which was in the centre of Port-au-Prince. To survive, the young man put his skills to use, painting idyllic scenes of the Haitian coast and selling them to foreigners visiting the ruins of the Palais National, which was the seat of government prior to the earthquake. *"It is the house of the demons,"* he comments, making no attempt to hide his contempt for the country's political leaders. *"They are all corrupt."*

Most Haitians share the same kind of sentiment. Many believe that if the country is saved one day, it will not be thanks to the authorities. Their disenchantment has a historical base. There is only one thing more common than the natural disasters in this Caribbean nation and that is the instability of its government. Haiti has experienced 32 coups d'état, 29 years under two of the cruellest dictators in the recent history of Latin America, and three foreign military occupations – the latest of which has now been in place for seven years.

This political upheaval has left the country's institutions in ruins. Not a single administration has proved capable of creating a minimum public service. Before 12 January 2010, the electricity grid reached little more than 12.5% of the total population, just 11% of homes had running water, 90% of primary education was in private hands and, in the health sector, there was only one doctor for every four thousand inhabitants, the lowest proportion in the Americas.

All these conditions, added to the instability of the constructions in Port-au-Prince, tripled the impact of the earthquake measuring 7 on the Richter scale. The worst disaster thus far in the 21st century killed 300,000 people, injured another 350,000 and left some 1.5 million homeless. The efforts to rescue the victims depended on international organisations and, above all, the determination of the population itself. The failure of the Haitian state was also confirmed on that day, 12 January.

## A new future?

Eleven weeks after the earthquake, officials from over 150 countries and international organisations met at the United Nations headquarters in New York to determine the path *"towards a new future"* for Haiti. The mood was optimistic. The donors pledged 5.3 billion dollars, which were supposed to reach the country within the following 18 months. The final document declared that the funds would be used to *"strengthen the authority of the state and make local*

*governments more effective"*.

The scale of the funding and the magnitude of the task ahead required the creation of a new body with governing powers. The conference thus supported the creation of the Interim Haiti Reconstruction Commission (IHRC), to be co-chaired by Haiti's prime minister and the former U.S. president Bill Clinton. Representatives from civil society organisations, donor countries and international institutions also serve on the Commission.

But one year on, only a fifth of the 5.3 billion dollars pledged has actually reached the country.

Without the funds pledged, the reconstruction plans have remained on paper. Port-au-Prince is still covered in waste and rubble. To give an idea, the earthquake generated 10 million cubic metres of debris, that is, ten times more than the attack on the World Trade Center. But only a little over 20% has been cleared thus far. Worse still, all of the 1.5 million people displaced (15% of the country's population) are still living in tents, with precarious access to water, sanitation and food. It is these conditions that are to blame for the outbreak of a cholera epidemic that has already claimed four thousand lives.

## A culture of decent work

Faced with the chaos and a failed government, losing sight of the priorities is perhaps only to be expected. But a consensus was reached as of the donor conference regarding the path to follow to arrive at the *"new future"*. Employers, workers, NGOs, governments and international institutions all speak of employment. The final communiqué of the New York Conference clearly stated: *"The people of Haiti need jobs."*

Labour organisations, however, are doubtful about the type of employment foreseen. *"Decent work policies have been given no place on the reconstruction agendas of government institutions, employers or the international community, including the United Nations, which is more focused on*

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Faced with the enormous challenge of Haiti's reconstruction, the trade unions' primary concern is to promote decent work in all sectors of society.  
→ ONU/Sophia Paris

*emergency action,"* warns the International Labour Organisation (ILO) representative in Haiti, Antonio Cruciani. *"The only exception is the ILO, which has worked to ensure that the decent work agenda is included in these strategies."*

It is against this background that the international trade union movement took the lead by organising the Trade Union Summit on the Reconstruction and Development of Haiti, in April 2010. Attended by the majority of the Haitian labour movement and trade union leaders from all over the world, the summit presented a road map defining the type of employment advocated by the trade union movement: employment that respects the international standards of the ILO, including jobs for all, with access to social protection, social dialogue and tripartism.

For the Haitian trade union movement, the most crucial task at hand is that of creating a culture that promotes decent work in all sectors of society, something which has never existed in the history of Haiti. Generations have gone by without workers ever knowing their most basic labour rights. Prior to the earthquake, at least 93% worked in the informal economy and 54% of the total population was living on less than a dollar a day.

Despite the unions' efforts to organise workers and take part in the reconstruction process, the fact is that the labour movement is in a very weak position at this moment in time. *"The Haitian trade union movement, in many respects, reflects the state of the economy,"* explains Anthony Jones, the ITUC/TUCA representative in the country. *"Today, formal workers only just represent 2% of the total and few unions have members in the informal economy. This is why the influence of trade unions has waned."*

### Rebuilding society

The informal economy includes, for example, the construction sector, which is to be the biggest source of employment in the coming years. Yet the country has never established minimum health and safety rules in the building industry. There are not even any statistics on accidents and deaths at work. There has been little mention in the strategic reconstruction plans of the extremely precarious situation of these workers or the need to ensure respect for international standards in all the projects.

*"We already have the trade union movement's road map, but our key problem now is the path towards reconstruction,"* comments Carlo Napoleón, general secretary of the Haitian trade union centre CSH (Coordination Syndicale Haïtienne). *"The reconstruction is not only physical, Haitian society also needs to be rebuilt. We have to train our workers and our young people. The skilled workers in the country today are all foreigners."*

The path the Haitian people will follow is even more uncertain than it was on that fateful 12 January 2010. The tumultuous electoral process has heightened the institutional vacuum and paralysed the reconstruction work.

Antonio Cruciani offers a recent example. *"We should not forget that the European continent was destroyed after the Second World War. But the countries joined forces. Both left and right. Unions and employers. They created a culture of enthusiasm with the reconstruction and together succeeded in promoting the economic boom of the sixties. How? All thanks to the social contract."* The major difference is that Haiti is still waiting for its Marshall Plan with a solid social dimension.

# Elections in Haiti. A long and ruinous wait

On 14 May 2011, a former pop singer without any political experience took office as Haiti's new president. During the inauguration ceremony, the presidential sash had to be presented in the dark because of a blackout. Nevertheless, on the makeshift wooden stage amidst the ruins of the presidential palace, the show had to go on. For Michel Martelly, it was an insignificant unexpected event compared with the electoral exploit which lasted more than 6 months and marked the tumultuous history of this Caribbean nation.

The first round of elections in Haiti had been held one hundred and sixty-eight days earlier, on 28 November, in a devastated country hit by a violent cholera epidemic and with signs of the start of reconstruction works nowhere in sight. There were 19 presidential candidates in all, and 917 aspirants to a legislative seat.

The elections were marred with serious problems from the outset. At least 200,000 voters were prevented from voting because the government did not manage to issue new voter ID cards. Moreover, there were allegations that the 1.5 million Haitians who live in camps had not even received any information about the electoral process. There was widespread ignorance about the candidates.

The turnout was extremely low. Approximately 27% of registered voters went to the polls -- a record abstention even in the opinion of Haitian business people. An even smaller number of votes was cast -- only 22.9%. Even lower rates were recorded in the regions most affected by the earthquake.

Consequently, the violent protests and complaints that ensued when the results were announced nine days later were practically expected. Through to the second round were former first lady Mirlande Manigat, in first place, and the ruling party's candidate Jude Celestin. Martelly came in third with approximately 6,800 votes -- 1% fewer than Celestin.

The international community then started to exert pressure

for a recount. An investigation was conducted through the Organisation of American States (OAS) and examined a sample of 8% of the ballots. 234 ballots were disqualified as a result. The mission of experts accordingly concluded that Martelly had come in second with a slim margin of 0.3% of the votes.

## Legitimacy deficit

Faced with a major political crisis and succumbing to international pressure, the Provisional Electoral Council of Haiti accepted the conclusions of the OAS report. Critics pointed out, however, that the authorities could not change the result without conducting a new count -- an unprecedented decision. They moreover indicated that there were serious doubts about the methods adopted by the experts. Despite the reigning mistrust, the electoral campaign that pitted Manigat against Martelly had fewer problems than the first time around.

Once again, as soon as the preliminary results were announced, the defeated candidate complained about electoral fraud and called for more transparent counting of the votes in future. Nevertheless, there was nothing Manigat could do to change the results. She maintained that what she wanted was the best for Haiti, and thanked her staff and her husband, former president Leslie Manigat.

Martelly won the elections with 68% of the vote, and received the presidential sash with a speech full of promises for change, with free education and public services for all Haitians. Addressing the thousands of people made homeless, he told them: *"I am not going to forget you, the people living in tents -- you can count on me."*

The new president promised to develop agriculture, to create a modern army and to respect the rights of the people and the workers. *"Haiti was asleep, and it is now awakening. You have given me this mandate, and trust me, things are going to change,"* he reassured them.

A.P.

28 November 2010 -- an electoral worker sits in a polling station in Port-au-Prince after frustrated voters destroyed election materials. They were protesting at the dodgy lists and the chaotic organisation of the polling stations. The turbulent elections took place against the background of political tensions and the deadly cholera epidemic. →REUTERS/Eduardo Munoz



# The Interim Haiti Reconstruction Commission and its serious flaws (IHRC)

Created to ensure transparency, the commission has failed in its most basic task: to ensure the involvement of Haitian society in the reconstruction process.



Building permanent homes, clearing away rubble, building hospitals, creating a safe drinking water supply and basic sanitation are pressing needs in Haiti. → ONU/Sophia Paris

During the Donors' Conference in New York on 31 March 2010, the international community and Haiti's government concluded that the reconstruction effort would require a new organisation capable of ensuring the transparent and accountable use of the funds. The Interim Haiti Reconstruction Commission (IHRC) formed by 30 members, including representatives from the Haitian government, civil society, donor countries and international organisations, was thus created.

Given its emergency role, this supranational organisation, co-chaired by the Haitian prime minister, Jean Max Bellerive, and the former U.S. president Bill Clinton, has a larger budget and greater powers to act than the Haitian state itself. Projects worth over 2 billion dollars in total were approved between July 2010 and March 2011. Since its creation, however, the Commission has been plagued with controversy.

Firstly, although it has been at work approving projects at monthly meetings, very little has been seen in terms of implementation. "The money has not arrived," explains the trade union representative serving on the IHRC, Jean Claude Lebrun. "The projects approved are not being implemented. The government is making no efforts to convince the international community and governments of donor countries to honour the funds pledged."

The projects approved but not implemented include key priorities for the people of Haiti, such as the construction of thousands of permanent shelters in the camps, the clearing of the rubble (little more than 20% was cleared in over 12

months), the building of hospitals, infrastructure providing access to clean water and basic sanitation, and the creation of "hundreds of thousands of jobs" linked to construction works.

Such contradictions can even be found in the institution's physical workings. The IHRC practically operates as a parliament, approving projects essential to society, but it does not have its own headquarters. The meetings are held in different venues, such as a hotel in Port-au-Prince or outside the country, in the United States or the Dominican Republic, and even "virtually".

"In November, a project approval conference was held over the telephone," commented Lebrun indignantly. Even worse, according to the trade unionist, twelve Haitian members of the Commission "did not answer the call". "As a result, they were considered absent. In theory, the decision making process was irregular, as most of the Haitian members were absent." Teleconferencing is, however, considered a legitimate means of holding a meeting in the institution's rules.

## An unclear future

In December 2010, amid the unrest caused by Haiti's elections, the Commission decided to meet outside the country, for the first time, in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. The conference was marked by the many questions raised by a majority of the members. One of the most critical was the CARICOM representative, Percival J. Patterson. "At this stage in the game it sounds desperate, but the situation is



urgent, the people of Haiti cannot carry on waiting forever," said the former Jamaican prime minister to the press agency EFE.

In an open letter, twelve IHRC representatives from the Haitian Executive protested that they had been systematically excluded from the decisions. The members added that they felt disconnected from the work, due to the lack of information received from the IHRC executive. They also denounced that their role has been limited to legitimating the actions decided on by the Commission's leaders.

The accusations were backed by the trade union representative. *"We are treated like passive members. We are not informed of anything and we do not know what they are doing,"* said Lebrun. According to the labour leader, the documents regarding projects are received the day before the meeting, and many are not translated into French. *"In my view, as a*



Jean Claude Lebrun, trade union representative serving on the IHRC: "We are not informed of anything". → A.P.

*member of the Commission, and one who doesn't speak English, I should have the documents a week before to be able to analyse them in consultation with others."*

A.P.

### Teacher killed

On 8 October 2010, during a demonstration in Port-au-Prince, Jean Filbert Louis was hit in the head by a police teargas grenade. Jean Filbert was a mathematics professor and a member of the higher education union *"l'Union nationale des normaliens d'Haiti"* (UNNOH) affiliated to the Public and Private Sector Workers' Confederation (CSTP). The demonstration had been organised by a coalition of organisations campaigning for the need to provide schooling for hundreds of thousands of children left outside the education system because of poverty or following the earthquake.

## "For workers there is a sense of fear and a plan of intimidation" (\*)

*"The laws only exist in the books. And so most unions do not have access to actuate. Furthermore, for workers there is a sense of fear and a plan of intimidation. They know that any noise or trouble trying to organise or trying to promote unions, their jobs would be at stake. This has been seen in a number of occasions in a number of different factories, where people raise issues to try to promote change and are fired as a consequence. With the shortage of jobs that existed, workers do not feel that they can in any way, shape or form, upset the employer. And so it is not only unionism*

*but is a whole lot of actions that could improve workers lives that are not being discussed or addressed. There needs to be serious and fundamental changes from a number of levels to better protect workers and to enforce the rules that existed.*

See the full Spotlight interview of Anthony Jones at: <http://www.ituc-csi.org/spotlight-interview-with-anthony.html>



Anthony Jones, ITUC representative in Haiti. →A.P.

# Stop wrongful dismissals

ITUC and trade unions call for an end to the wrongful dismissals becoming increasingly frequent in Haiti

The latest report by the ITUC's representative in Haiti, prepared with the support of the AUMODH, speaks of illegal and unfair dismissals, without due payment, and with the added problems of pressure and intimidation. It also mentions several cases of sexual harassment and describes illegal situations in both the private and public sector, where employees have worked for years without being officially appointed to their post.

The ITUC has appealed, notably, for guarantees for the rights of disabled workers. Camille Rosemène works as a gardener at the Institut Mixte de Nazareth (a coeducational college). Her legs were severely injured in the earthquake. In October 2010, when schools and colleges officially reopened in Haiti,

she took her courage in both hands and returned to work. But the Institute informed her she no longer had a job, and refused to enter into conciliation. Camille wants to tell her story while she waits for a solution to her case, prepared with the support of the AUMODH and the ITUC-TUCA, to prevent similar situations occurring.

The latest cases to be reported to the Haitian trade unions have been taken to the labour courts, and these legal proceedings have enabled some workers win the money owed them by their employers. The ITUC and the Haitian trade unions nevertheless

A-C.G.

## A minimum wage too low to live on

According to a study published at the beginning of March by the Solidarity Centre, the victims of the Haiti earthquake are facing renewed difficulties, this time financial. The report compares the cost of living in Haiti, which has risen since the disaster of 12 January 2010, to the minimum wage. Workers say that it is getting more and more difficult, even impossible, to meet their families' needs. There is nothing surprising about this as the study reveals that the minimum wage for an adult who needs to meet their own needs and those of two children should be 29,971 gourdes (about 750 USD), or at least 1,152 gourdes per day (29 USD). Yet the daily minimum wage in Haiti is only 200 gourdes (5 USD) and 125 gourdes (3 USD) in the export processing zones.

# Haitian trade unions call for better social protection

On 16 May, the day following the inauguration of Michel Martelly, trade unions met to denounce the failings of the social protection system and to call for the establishment of a social protection floor in Haiti.

The two-day event was one of the top priorities in an action plan drawn up with the TUCA, the ITUC and several Global Union Federations to implement the trade union road map for the reconstruction and development of Haiti.

The trade unions highlighted the failings of the existing social welfare institutions and identified more than ten public social security bodies that operate without any real coordination or social dialogue. Furthermore, the services provided by the various social security agencies are concentrated in the capital and do not cover workers in the informal economy. And finally, some services foreseen by law are not provided or are inadequate. A law introduced several years ago provides for the creation of a Management Board for the social security institutions, but has never been implemented.

## More protection for women

A revised Labour Code, therefore, should guarantee an effective social protection system. The women trade unionists attending the event also stressed that it should include a gender dimension. The majority of Haitian women are employed in precarious jobs or work in the informal economy, and they still don't receive maternity benefits.

Social security benefits are inadequate as a general rule and



For the trade unions, social protection and decent work must form the basis of the fair and effective reconstruction of Haitian society. → Alice Smeets

must be revised. Trade union delegates therefore called on the international community to contribute to the consolidation of decent work by financing a social protection floor. Furthermore, each trade union organisation has appointed a social protection expert. This network will carry out a study and make proposals to be submitted to the new government. Before his election, President Martelly indicated that he was in favour of consolidating an effective social protection system.

The ITUC concluded by saying that real reconstruction must be based on social protection and decent work, with a social protection floor as the best guarantee for redistributing wealth and combating poverty.

A-C.G.

# No man's land: the permanent emergency camps

Cité Soleil started out as a humanitarian aid camp in the Haitian capital. Camp Corail, set up to shelter earthquake survivors, now looks doomed to the same fate.



Camp Corail (Camp Coral) was portrayed by the authorities as "safe" and "comfortable". Its inhabitants describe it as "inhospitable". →A.P.

Some 30 kilometres north of Port-au-Prince is a wide and barren stretch of arid land at the foot of an equally arid mountain. Until just over a year ago, there was virtually no life on this dusty, limestone plain with a scattering of cactus. Now it is occupied by endless rows of tents, sheltering tens of thousands of displaced people.

It is Camp Corail, set up three months following the earthquake as part of a coordinated effort involving the United Nations, humanitarian aid agencies and the United States military. It was to be a model initiative, the authorities had said at the time, to move people out of their improvised shelters and into a "safe" and "comfortable" place.

Emmanuel Louissant was among those who believed in the promise that everything would be better. To convince him to leave Port-au-Prince, he was offered a job through the Cash-for-Work programme. *"I worked for six days digging trenches. That was all. They paid me 200 gourdes (5 dollars) a day. How can I be expected to support my family and children with that?"* he asks indignantly.

Corail has gone from being a model camp to a symbol of failure. Its inhabitants – as many as 100,000 people according to some estimates – rely on water transported in trucks by NGOs. Its isolation also means that it is cut off from all access to services, food or work, as the transport to Port-au-Prince is poor and costly. *"We had a life before. Now we have no option but to sit here in this inhospitable land without doing anything,"* says Emmanuel.

## Golf course

Around 1.5 million people lost their homes in the earthquake and had no option but to occupy open spaces such as plazas and parks, or schools and buildings. Makeshift settlements sprung up throughout the capital and other parts of the country. One of the largest was set up at the golf club in Petionville, an affluent district of Port-au-Prince.

The occupations unveiled an age-old conflict within Haitian society. According to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), 74% of the camps were established on private land. As a result, it was not long before the supposed owners called for their land to be vacated. In many cases, this was and still is being carried out by means of threats and violent evictions.

The situation has highlighted a major obstacle to reconstruction. The owners want the homeless to be sent back to their destroyed neighbourhoods, but there is no official land register in the country - the result of a corrupt legal system, a weak state and decades of political instability. According to the United Nations, less than 5% of properties are officially registered, making it impossible to determine who the legitimate owners are.

There are claims that the few title deeds that exist are held by a small portion of the country's elite. This handful of families own the best land in Port-au-Prince's suburbs, the ideal place to accommodate the hundreds of thousands of displaced people. However, it was precisely based on





After losing his whole family and his shop in the earthquake, Domercant Fenel rebuilt part of his business and created the Corail Residents Committee. →A.P.

property rights claims that the 50,000 people occupying the Petionville golf club were gradually transferred to Camp Corail in the isolated desert.

### Fighting for rights

Domercant Fenel was the only member of his family to survive the earthquake. His clothing stall in the capital was also completely destroyed. He nonetheless found the strength to recover much of his merchandise from under the debris. He later managed to open a business at Camp Corail, in a small wooden cabin that is also his home and where the suits from his former shop are carefully packed.

Domercant has very few customers, but his new venture represents much more than a means of making ends meet. It is a way of preserving the pride he regained for himself, a sense of pride that he wants all those living in the camp to share. As part of this endeavour, he set up the Corail residents' committee to defend their rights. *"We know that a lot of money was intended for this settlement, but it never reached us. That's why we are mobilising, to get what is rightfully ours,"* he declared.

The camp dwellers' organisation has succeeded in having a school opened in the middle of the settlement, where 11 classrooms are now up and running. *"The government should have taken charge of opening the school, but it left it to the people in the camp. No one here had the money to do it,"* said the school's director, Boyer Sansoir. The people at the camp found themselves with the classrooms up and ready to use but the lessons could not start due to the lack of basic materials such as chalk and an attendance register.

Frustrated by the delay being caused by the authorities, the residents managed to scrape together, one cent at a time, the 125 dollars needed to start the classes. But problems still remain. The teachers, says the school director, have not received their wages from the government and the only material that has arrived so far is ten packs of paper. The

school is therefore forced to save the little it has as much as it can, including the only box of chalk it bought.

### Out of control

The school is also seeing the number of pupils grow every day; the reason being that the camp, which initially gave shelter to 4000 people, has now grown by at least tenfold. There are signs that not only will all the inhabitants of the tent city in Petionville be transferred to Corail, but also the 10,000 displaced people occupying the Champ de Mars in front of the Palais National.

But Corail is also growing beyond the control of the NGOs, the UN and the government. Thousands of people, attracted by the basic services offer by aid organisations have occupied the areas surrounding the camp. The shelters they have built are even more precarious than the tents and, as such, highly vulnerable to hurricanes or landslides. Furthermore, they do not have access to the water and latrines offered to the camp dwellers, heightening the risk of a cholera epidemic.

Something similar happened in the past. In 1952, 52 families of sugarcane workers were placed in constructions near the international airport. The population went on to grow years later with the arrival of people displaced by fires in Port-au-Prince. In the eighties, the shanty town, which already had 83,000 inhabitants, grew uncontrollably with the arrival of thousands of people migrating from Haiti's rural areas to the capital. Cité Soleil, the largest slum in the Americas, thus came into being, and is now home to some 400,000 inhabitants.

At Corail, NGOs have financed the construction of semi-permanent housing to replace the tents. The new houses and the ocean of precarious shelters stretching as far as the eye can see are clear proof that this is not a temporary settlement, raising fears that another Cité Soleil is in the making.

# Export processing zones: precarious work cannot pull Haiti out of poverty

Export processing zones have found fertile ground in Haiti and are one of the only employment options in the country. But what of the implications for workers' rights?



More than a year after the earthquake that left 32 buildings in the Sonapi industrial park intact, long queues of job seekers still form at the gates of the miraculously saved factories, still hoping for work despite the low pay and lack of protection. →A.P.

Every day, a crowd of people forms in front of the gates of the Sonapi Industrial Park in Port-au-Prince, hoping to find work. Given the number of people, one would think that good jobs were on offer. But 15,000 people employed at this factory complex producing clothes for export are working for less than seven dollars a day. It is also one of the only sources of formal employment in the country.

The earthquake did not cause any significant damage to any of the 32 buildings in the industrial park and no employees were killed on that day, 12 January, although many of them were working. The fact that they came out of it practically unscathed meant that the factories were back in operation within two weeks of the disaster. Sonapi's reopening was used as a symbol that the country could return to "normality".

Over a year on, no other sources of employment have emerged, and the lines of jobseekers offer proof of the industrial park's inability to generate even the minimum amount of jobs needed. Every month, 250 young people are selected from among thousands to attend a sewing course promoted by USAID, the United States Agency for International Development. Senat Jinette, aged 20, was one of those selected, but she does not consider it a privilege. "I'm here to learn how to sew and, who knows, maybe I'll find a job afterwards. That's my objective," she commented.

The course leader, Natacha Joseph, explains that most young people start the training with many other ambitions in mind, more than just a factory job. "They are here to learn

how to use the machines, as many only know how to sew by hand. The course offers them the opportunity of finding a job. As of then they can save and perhaps go to university," she explains.

## Baseballs

Prior to the earthquake, clothes production represented 10% of GDP and 91% of the country's exports. Export processing in Haiti has already, in fact, existed for five decades. The industry was established thanks to the country's proximity to the U.S. market, the United States' tariff benefits and, not least, the precarious employment that has always provided companies with low labour costs.

Subsequent fiscal incentives enacted by the U.S. government for Haitian products led the number of export factories to multiply. During the 1980s, under the dictatorship of Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier, some 200 companies employed 100,000 workers in the production of clothes, toys and baseballs. At that time, USAID officials had predicted that Haiti was set to become the "Taiwan of the Caribbean".

However, in the years that followed, the exploitation of Haiti's low-cost labour proved insufficient stimulus to keep companies in the country. Political instability, the lack of infrastructure and high shipping taxes resulted in production being moved to more profitable sites, such as Jamaica, Costa Rica and neighbouring Dominican Republic.

Since then, the "peak" in export production seen in the 80s has never been reached again. When the earthquake hit, the industry employed a total of just 28,000 workers across the country. Many economists question whether the model has ever actually been of any benefit to Haiti. In the first place, the companies operate with temporary workers and employ in accordance with market demand, which results in thousands of workers being dismissed every season.

Another problem relates to the factories' lack of linkages with the local economy. Although a few producers have used local raw materials (fabric, thread, glue, etc.), most prefer to import them. The working conditions are a case apart. The workers have been the hardest hit, living on poverty wages and working long hours, with no knowledge of their most basic labour rights. To cap it all, many of those attempting to organise face repression.

### Haiti's big chance

Anti-union sentiment has grown over the years. "We managed to form 60 associations in various companies in the country's export processing zones. Now employers will not hear any talk of trade unions in the industrial parks," denounces Paul Loulou, general secretary of the CTH. "Haiti has a labour law and has signed the Conventions of the ILO but, in practice, if workers mention the possibility of forming a union, the boss looks out of the window and tells them there are thousands of people outside waiting for a job."

Employers confirm that the conditions for keeping production in the country have become almost unviable, given the serious infrastructural problems: the earthquake left the only port in the capital practically out of action and the airport is still experiencing operational problems.

"I will agree to pay higher wages as and when the buyers in the United States agree to pay me more for my goods," says Kyung Jung, vice president of Gloria Apparel, one of the four Korean companies in the industrial park. One of the buyers is the supermarket chain Walmart.

Despite the obvious problems, there is no lack of voices defending this development model. Ten months before the earthquake, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon wrote an article for the New York Times in which he spoke of Haiti's "big chance". Without using the term "decent work", he defended massive employment creation by "dramatically expanding the country's export processing zones, so that a new generation of textile firms can invest and do business in one place." It is a system, affirmed Ban Ki-Moon, that has been successfully applied in Bangladesh, Uganda and Rwanda.

This vision of development was the first to be resuscitated following the tragedy. On 12 January 2011, one year to the day after the earthquake, the former U.S. president Bill Clinton and Haiti's prime minister, Jean-Max Bellerive, along with representatives of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the Korean company Sae-A, signed an agreement on the biggest public-private project ever seen in Haiti. A total of 248 million dollars will be invested in setting up a new industrial park in the north of the country, creating 20,000 jobs.

The unions were not invited to take part in drawing up the project and fear that, as in the capital, they will not have access to the new park. If this is, once again, "Haiti's big chance", the question is when will the country be given a real opportunity to build a solid and decent social foundation?

A.P.

## Ouanaminthe: a hard-fought battle to secure a historic agreement

**Sokowa is the only trade union in the history of Haiti to have secured a collective bargaining agreement, but only after mass dismissals, persecution and the intervention of foreign troops.**

In April 2002, the then president of Haiti, Jean Bertrand Aristide, met with his counterpart from the Dominican Republic, Hipólito Mejía, in the town of Ouanaminthe, on the northeast border of Haiti. The heads of state were there to announce the construction of an export processing zone capable of creating up to 1500 jobs. "The relationship between the two countries is a marriage without divorce," said the Dominican president at the time.

Three and a half years later, this small rural community of 100,000 inhabitants was the stage for another historic moment, the signing of the first collective bargaining agreement in Haiti's history. This victory, still the only one of its kind in the country, is the result of a David and Goliath style battle between the Haitian trade union Sendika Ouvriye Kodevi Wament (Sokowa) and the Dominican textile giant Grupo M.

The trade union struggle in Ouanaminthe began following the inauguration of the industrial park, when the International Finance Corporation (IFC) - the World Bank's private-sector lending arm - gave Grupo M a 20-million-dollar loan to establish the Industrial Development Company (Codevi) in Haiti. Under pressure from the international trade union movement, the IFC made the loan conditional on respect for labour rights in the factories, such as freedom of association and collective bargaining.

Despite the agreement, it was not long before Grupo M launched a brutal onslaught against the recently created union at the industrial park. The first blow to be dealt was the dismissal of 32 workers, all members of Sokowa, which had 35 members at the time. Widespread protest forced the company to reinstate them some weeks later, but there was no change in the appalling working conditions and the policy of harassing unionised workers, compelling the labour organisation to step up its fight.

"We declared a strike that was brutally suppressed by troops from the Dominican Republic's army," recalls Yannick Etienne, leader of the Bataye Ouvriye trade union centre to which Sokowa is affiliated. "A pregnant woman was beaten in the attack. The brutality was outrageous." The vast majority of the workers then joined the strike, calling for better pay and the withdrawal of the troops from the factory.

Grupo M, rejecting all calls for dialogue, responded some days later with the dismissal of another 350 workers and the closure of several production units. It was then that international solidarity came into play. The U.S. Solidarity Center put pressure on multinationals such as Levi-Strauss, which buys jeans produced at Codevi, as well as on the World Bank. In



"The combination of external and internal pressure created a force too strong for Grupo M to withstand." Yannick Etienne, Bataye Ouvriye → A.P.



Europe, a joint campaign was launched by organisations such as Clean Clothes (Belgium), Réseaux Solidarité (France) and Haiti Support Group (United Kingdom).

Following a dispute lasting eight months, the bosses finally agreed to negotiations. *"Our strategy to use international pressure bore fruit. Both Levi-Strauss and the World Bank had made commitments regarding respect for workers' rights, and these were being violated,"* explained Yannick. *"The international campaign was linked up with our action in Haiti. It was a difficult period, but the workers remained united throughout. The combination of external and internal pressure created a force too strong for Grupo M to withstand."*

The union and the company signed an agreement in February 2005, which included commitments to gradually reinstate the employees dismissed and to recognise Sokowa as the workers' legitimate representative. A series of long drawn-out negotiations led to the securing of other gains, such as the setting up of a health and safety committee, optional work on Saturdays and overtime pay. But the main victory was achieved in December of that year: a collective agreement with a duration of three years.

Since then, the Codevi workers have kept up the fight. In spite of the high employee turnover rate, thanks to union

recognition a membership rate of 90% has been maintained in the factories. Furthermore, a successful campaign led to the renewal of the collective agreement until 2016, with additional gains being secured such as an education programme part-funded by the company, access to lower cost lunches and the establishment of a follow-up group to monitor the progress of these measures.

*"A great deal remains to be done. The bosses always find new ways of violating our rights,"* commented Yannick. The trade union leader gives an example, explaining that when production is organised along piecework lines, the company increases the daily quota in such a way that it is impossible to meet it within the 8-hour working day, but the extra time needed to meet the target is not paid.

The Ouanaminthe Industrial Park was not affected by the earthquake of 12 January, but the disaster represented an additional fight for the country's trade union movement as a whole. *"Without better pay, good working conditions and collective bargaining, we cannot achieve anything. There is a huge deficit in the organisation of workers in Haiti,"* says Yannick. *"At present, the Reconstruction Committee is not talking of sustainable development, but only of the need to create jobs. But employment is not the same as decent work,"* she concludes.

A.P.

## Trade union movement supporting vocational training for young people

The 8th December 2010 was a very special day for 77 young Haitians, 14- to 17-year-olds, from Port-au-Prince. After five months of dedicated studying, they received their diplomas in joinery, plumbing, sewing and cookery.

The programme to *"Strengthen Trade Union Action to Promote Vocational Training for Adolescents in Haiti"* was a pilot project funded by the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (ILO-IPEC) and implemented by the Trade Union Confederation of the Americas (TUCA) in collaboration with the Haitian trade union confederation Confédération des travailleurs haïtiens (CTH).

The qualification they received extended beyond purely technical knowledge. The 77 students took vocational training courses that included, as part of the curriculum, education on human and labour rights and a grounding in the ethics of human and labour relations.

One of the students, Charles Daniel, lives in Cité Soleil, and it would take him two hours to reach his sewing classes from Monday to Friday. But it was well worth the effort, he explained. *"I learnt a great deal, it was a very valuable experience. I am planning to get together with friends to open a small sewing workshop, thanks to what*



→A.P.

*we were taught on the course.*

The project also contributed to strengthening the Haitian trade union movement, as a variety of trade union organisations, such as MOISE, the CSH, SSH, MSH, UACSH and CTSP, took part in the process of orientating the students.

*"Given all the difficulties in Haiti, which have become even worse since the earthquake, the cholera epidemic and the protests over the elections, the results have been very positive,"* commented the TUCA project advisor, Lyvia Rodrigues. *"It was also a ground-breaking initiative for the TUCA, as it was the first time that we worked in such close and direct collaboration with the grassroots of the trade union movement."*

A.P.

# The big clearance sale of Haiti's public assets

Haiti's neoliberal catastrophe has been as devastating as the natural disaster. And the process is still underway.

Five days prior to the earthquake in Haiti, the country suffered a major shock. Unlike the earthquake, it was not a natural disaster but an economic one. On 7 January 2010, President René Préval concluded the privatisation of the Haitian telephone company Teleco, selling it off to the Vietnamese company Viettel for 59 million dollars. It was yet another step in the government's drive to sell off Haiti's public assets, with the support of the World Bank.

The process of dismantling Teleco commenced a few years earlier, with the rapid entry of mobile telephone companies. One of them, Digicel, which started operations in Haiti in 2006, reached the 1.4 million dollar mark in its first year, demonstrating the massive need for the service. Another two firms, Viola and Haitel, followed, and the country soon became one of the most promising mobile telephone markets in the Caribbean.

Their success was proportional to the poor reputation of the landline service. For years, labour organisations in Haiti have been denouncing the campaign waged by the Préval government to sabotage Teleco. Moves to dismantle the company began years before its privatisation and included the dismissal of 2,800 workers. The state telephonists' union had, at the time, accused the government of deliberately promoting the company's mismanagement in order to justify its sale.

*"Teleco's privatisation got rid of the union at the company. But not only that, the wave of privatizations promoted by the government is seriously damaging the country's entire trade union movement,"* commented the general secretary of the public and private sector workers' confederation CTSP, Dukens Raphael. *"Because the public sector is the only one that is really organised. Private sector employers do not even allow the word 'union' to be mentioned."*

The government claimed that Teleco's privatisation was owed to its staffing levels compared with those of private mobile telephone companies, in an attempt to demonstrate its inefficiency. President Préval, in a statement to the IPS press agency, commented that *"Haitel has 500 employees for 350,000 subscribers and Digicel 700 employees for 1.4 million subscribers, whilst Teleco has 3,293 employees for only 150,000 subscribers."*

## Public companies sold off on the cheap

During his first term in office (1996-2001), Préval also oversaw the privatisation of two other state enterprises: the Minoterie flour mill and the state-owned cement company. As with Teleco, the process was supervised by the Council for the Modernisation of Public Enterprises (CMEP), a governmental organisation chaired by Haiti's prime minister.

The privatisation of the Minoterie flour mill in 1997, the first in Haiti's history, was shrouded in stealth and controversy. The company had managed to secure a profit of 5.8 million



Dukens Raphael: *Public services need to be reorganised and strengthened. This is why we are standing up to fight against this headlong drive towards privatisation.* →A.P.

dollars in 1987, but its operations were then shut down in the years prior to its sell-off. Critics highlight that its gradual decline was deliberate, to justify its privatisation. The company, with its 16 mills and exclusive port, was sold to a consortium of U.S. companies for the paltry sum of nine million dollars.

In 1999, despite popular protest against the handover of public assets, the government managed to privatise the national cement company, selling it to a consortium of Haitian, Colombian and Swiss investors for 15.6 million dollars. Production was halted shortly after the sale, and the company's port has since been used for the import of cement. Millions of tons of cement are now needed to rebuild the country.

The earthquake has put the brakes on the privatisation drive, but there is pressure for the process to continue under the new administration with the sale of the port, the electricity company, the airport, the credit bank and the pension system. Once again, the excuse being used for their sell-off is the weakness of the services.

According to Dukens Raphael, although public companies are in a sorry situation, the state should come up with a different solution. *"What the public is offered is precarious, but it is there. Why not strengthen it rather than privatising it?"* he asks. *"State pensions, maternity benefits and retirement benefits all come under the social security system. All of this exists but it doesn't work; investment is needed to make it work."*

The trade union leader goes further. *"We have a very clear position within our organisation. Public services need to be reorganised and strengthened, but education, electricity, water, social security and basic services must be kept in the hands of the state. This is why we are standing up to fight against this headlong drive towards privatisation."*

# When the dream turns into a nightmare for Haitian children

Thousands of Haitian children leave every year to try their luck in the Dominican Republic, a substantially more developed country. Extreme poverty, despair and very limited access to education are at the root of most of this emigration. Those crossing the border illegally are prey to robbery, sexual abuse and murder (1).



"Finding a job in the Dominican Republic is extremely difficult. Many children end up as beggars or shoeshiners". →REUTERS/Eduardo Munoz

*"I went to school until I was nine. My parents could not afford to pay for me after that, and I had to start working with my father in agriculture and livestock farming,"* explains 14-year-old David (2) who lives in Margot (a communal section of Pilate, in the Nord department). *"A year later my parents insisted that I should join my cousin in Santiago, the second largest city in the Dominican Republic, to work as a building labourer. They were hoping I would have a better life out there and that I would be able to send them some money to help meet the needs of my two brothers and two sisters."* Accounts like these can be given by tens of thousands of Haitians. In Pilate, for example, two hours from Cap-Haïtien, the local authorities estimate that all the families in half of the communal sections have at least one child working in the Dominican Republic.

The vast majority of the Haitian children who go the Dominican Republic to find work do not have the travel documents needed to cross the border legally so are placed in the hands of traffickers who smuggle them across the border, using one of the hundreds of illegal crossing points, and take them to the desired location in the Dominican Republic.

There are traffickers in many Haitian villages. They take small groups of Haitian migrants to areas along the border where they usually collaborate with local traffickers who know the terrain well. Small human (adults and children) trafficking rings are formed in this way.

### Between 75 and 100 dollars for the journey

Depending on the departure and arrival points, and the negotiating skills of the prospective migrant, the price for being taken from a Haitian village to anywhere further than the border in the Dominican Republic is between 3,000 to 4,000 gourdes (75 to 100 US dollars). To raise this amount of money, many migrants sell everything they have or borrow from loan sharks at astronomical rates of interest. *"I borrowed 3,000 gourdes from my aunt to pay a trafficker and promised to pay back 6,000 gourdes when I had found a job in the Dominican Republic,"* says fifteen-year-old Wilson, from Piment (a communal section of Pilate). *"I paid her back eight months later."*

Depending on the region, the border is crossed on foot, through small backcountry or mountain paths, or by river.

During the dry season, the rivers are crossed using truck tire inner tubes (used as rafts), or ropes when the water level is high. Once on the other side of the border, they have to walk, sometimes for several days, then the Haitian traffickers usually hand them over to Dominicans who are paid to take the migrants to their final destination on motorbikes or in cars and pick-up trucks, where they cram in as many of them as possible. "Some of my Dominican contacts use refrigerated trucks to transport the Haitians (avoiding lowering the temperature!), because the Dominican soldiers at checkpoints on the road are unlikely to suspect that people could be in there," explains Sony Francis, a trafficker from Ferrier (Nord-Est department).

### Corrupt Dominican soldiers

Haitians are prey to extortion and all kinds of violence during the border crossing, which generally takes place at night. One of their main fears is being detected by the Dominican soldiers who patrol the border areas in large numbers. "The soldiers are very poorly paid and they ask us for money to let us go," says Sony Francis. "They usually ask for 300 pesos (US\$8) per person. I always give my clients instructions not to flee if we are discovered by soldiers, and to leave me to negotiate with them. When they are soldiers that have just been posted to the region, it is not always possible to bribe them and there is a risk of being arrested and deported back to Haiti."

Despite the traffickers' recommendations, many Haitians panic when intercepted by Dominican soldiers and try to run away. Such was the case with Wiguine, a twelve-year-old girl from Pilate: "There were four of us. We had been walking through the woods in the Dominican Republic for several hours when we were spotted by about ten soldiers. We were frightened by their guns and dogs. I ran as fast as I could but a dog caught me, biting me on the calf and making me fall. The soldiers hit us, took everything we had (they took my little bag with a few clothes in it) and then let us go when the trafficker had paid them. I tried to treat the bite with a piece of cloth, but I really suffered during the two hours we still had to walk."

### Young migrant women sexually abused

Many Haitians who have been trafficked over the border tell of the rapes and sexual abuse perpetrated by Dominican soldiers. "If there are pretty women in the group, the soldiers demand to have sex with them," testifies Sony Francis. "It is our responsibility to negotiate with them as much as possible to talk them out of it, but it is not always possible." In 2010, seventeen-year-old Etienne from Margot indirectly witnessed such abuses. "I was in a group of 15 people and we were caught by four soldiers. They started to strip us of everything. They stole 300 gourdes from me (US\$7.50) and took 500 gourdes (US\$12) from the traffickers. There were four young women with us. The soldiers took them aside to search them. When they came back they looked very upset. The traffickers had tried to talk with the soldiers before this happened, but they wouldn't listen to them." Girls as young as 14 testify that they have suffered sexual violence at the hands of soldiers when illegally crossing over to the Dominican Republic.

The danger is even greater when the migrants fall prey to gangs of robbers. "With them, it is war" says the trafficker Sony Francis. "I tell the people in my group to take a stick and stones to defend themselves, because these robbers

(Dominican and Haitian) will not negotiate and they are armed with iron rods, machetes, knives... People can get killed." On 16 January 2011, Henry Denaud, a member of the communal section assembly (ASEC) of Cachiman, a commune on the border near Belladère (Centre department), received a telephone call from a local authority in the Dominican Republic. "They were calling to tell us that the body of a Haitian woman had been found just five metres across the Dominican side of the border, in a place called Carizal. I went there with some town notables from Cachiman. She had been stoned to death. We were unable to identify her as she was not carrying any papers. We took her body just over the border to Haiti to bury her. A week later, the Dominican authorities called me again. This time, a Haitian woman and child had been savagely killed; their bodies were only around a hundred metres from the body found seven days earlier. The child's head had been chopped off and placed on the woman's stomach. The bodies had already been partially devoured by dogs so they could not be identified, but as no one corresponding to their description had disappeared in the area we are sure they were Haitians from farther away who were trying to cross the border illegally." The heinous nature of these crimes would suggest that the perpetrators were robbers, as although soldiers do sometimes shoot at Haitian migrants when they try to flee, if they are killed it is with bullet wounds, not the degree of savagery found in these two cases.

### All that for...

On reaching their destination in the Dominican Republic, many Haitian children are disappointed by the difficulties in finding work there. They realise that the Haitians who go back to visit their villages wearing their best clothes "forget" to mention how hard life can be on the other side of the border. "My cousin had lied to me when he said that jobs were easy to come by," says Wilson, the 15-year-old who had borrowed money from his aunt to pay his trafficker. "I was able to live at his place in Santiago, but I only found work as a building labourer for one month out of the seven months I spent there. During that month, I worked from Monday to Saturday from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m., for around 300 pesos (eight dollars) a day, then I lost my job when the works were finished. I would see many Haitian children begging or working as shoe shiners in the streets of Santiago, but I wanted a more dignified job. I was able to count on the solidarity of local people who would give me food on the days when I had no work, but I could not go on like that forever. I decided to go back to Haiti. My dream is to go to school or to learn a trade."

In spite of the failures and the risks associated with crossing the border illegally, the Dominican Republic remains the only ray of hope for millions of Haitians faced with extreme poverty, natural disasters and their leaders' chronic inability to put the country on the road to development. "We are not stupid," concludes a doctor from the Cap-Haïtien region. "If, aside from students, all the girls who come back from the Dominican Republic are widely known as 'bouzens (the Creole word for prostitutes) from Santo Domingo', it means that something is going on there. We also know that most children end up being exploited, working as beggars or domestics, etc. But what can you say to parents who have had nothing other than coffee beans to give their children to eat for five days?"

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*Will everything be better under the new government and thanks to international donations? That is what people would like to believe, perhaps, in the long term, but it is now that the children are suffering from malnutrition. For as long as the only 'normal' country they can access is the*

*Dominican Republic, they will always be tempted by it, it's human nature."*

**Samuel Grumiau**

(1) Report drawn up within the framework of a study mission on child trafficking headed by UNICEF Haiti.

(2) The names of the children quoted have been changed for their safety.

## 'Restaveks', the child slaves



→Alice Smeets

Miriam is a seven year-old girl who lives in Port-au-Prince. Her father died four years ago. Her mother left for the countryside to organise his funeral, and never came back. Today she lives with neighbours, who have a six year-old child. While he plays outside with his friends, Miriam cleans the house, washes up and does the shopping. In exchange, she has the right to sleep on the floor and eat the family's leftovers. Miriam is a 'restavek'.

According to the Restavek Freedom Foundation, there are more than 300 000 restaveks in Haiti. This Creole term, derived from the French 'reste avec' (stay with), refers to the children who live with host families and are used as domestic servants, even slaves. Previously the

children of poor families were sent to richer homes to work and be fed and cared for, even educated. Today, this is no longer the case. Often the families who employ the children are in a similar economic situation to their biological family.

After the 12 January 2010 earthquake, the Port-au-Prince Development Support Centre warned the number of restaveks would rise. Although it is difficult to put a figure on it, the situation has obviously worsened: first because the catastrophe orphaned many children or separated them from their parents and second because it has thrown many families into poverty.

**A-C.G. et A.S.**