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# Haiti 2004

iCD



A nation in crisis

Anne M Street



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Cover photo: Members of the Gwo  
Zagou *kombite* (work-exchange  
agricultural collective) in south-  
eastern Haiti near Jacmel. The name  
Gwo Zagou means 'big foot'. The  
*kombite* members chose the name  
as a statement of pride in response  
to the attitudes of the elite, who  
disparagingly refer to peasants as  
'big foot'. Photo © Leah Gordon.

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# Introduction

1 January 2004 marked the 200th anniversary of the founding of independent Haiti. After a difficult and troubled past, the year 2004 finds the country at a point of transition.

On 29 February president Jean-Bertrand Aristide was deposed, following a short military rebellion led by members of the disbanded army, together with former militia members and ex-police, who had been living in exile. In the preceding months there had been widespread popular demonstrations against Aristide's increasingly isolated and dictatorial rule. This popular discontent with a government that had been elected on a pro-poor agenda by an overwhelming majority of the population followed nearly four years of political stalemate.

Since June 2000 the government of Haiti has been cut off from economic aid by the government of the United States, the European Union and the multilateral financial institutions. This embargo followed disputed elections in

Haiti in May 2000 as opposition figures called into question the way votes were counted and the ensuing results in 10 Senatorial seats. The inability of the government and opposition, as well as the international community, to work together to resolve the political crisis that led to the embargo has compounded an already disastrous humanitarian situation, and left the vast majority of the country's poor people in a situation of deep social and economic crisis.

In the face of widespread poverty, failed government and an under-performing economy, CIIR is concerned about the ability of the vast mass of people to simply survive in Haiti today. This report examines the background to that situation, outlines the grave humanitarian crisis facing the Haitian population, and makes policy recommendations for the British government, the European Union and civil society in Europe.

# The economic situation

## Poverty deepens as indicators worsen

For more than a decade Haiti has been the poorest country in the Western hemisphere, and one of the poorest in the world, with the worst socio-economic indicators outside sub-Saharan Africa. It is also the second most densely populated in the western hemisphere, after Barbados. Less than one person in 50 has a steady wage-earning job, and annual per head income is around US\$450, which is less than 15 per cent of the Latin American average (Economist Intelligence Unit – EIU, 2003a).

Gross domestic product has declined from US\$4,089 million in 1999 to US\$2,983 million in 2003 (EIU, 2003b). A World Bank study in 1998 noted a 5.2 per cent decline in per capita gross national product between 1985 and 1995 (World Bank, 1998a). Foreign exchange reserves now stand at a mere US\$72.7 million compared to US\$264 million before the crisis of 2000.

The United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP's) human development ranking for 2003 put Haiti at 150th in the world, down from 146th the previous year (UNDP, 2002a and 2003). Life expectancy has declined from 52.6 years in 2002 to 49.1 years in 2003. In its *Economic and social situation of Haiti in 2002* update, the UNDP notes that Haiti would now need more than 50 years, or two generations, to recover from its current state of under-development (UNDP, 2002b). Forty-seven per cent of Haitians live on less than UK£1 a day. In 1998 less than 40 per cent of the population had ready access to safe drinking water, compared with an average of 70 per cent in other countries classified by the World Bank as 'low income'.

In December 2002 representatives from a number of international non-government organisations (NGOs) working in Haiti, including the British agencies Christian Aid, Oxfam and Action Aid, issued a joint statement expressing their concerns:

We are greatly alarmed by the accelerated degradation of the socio-economic conditions, by the lost economic opportunities at the national, regional and global level, and by the systematic deterioration of the environment. In effect our regular contact with the population has allowed us to register the decline in certain indicators of quality of life.

A year later, in December 2003, many of the same agencies signed a further public declaration which stated:

'At the close of 2003, Haiti is living in a crisis without precedent.'

During 2003 the situation was further aggravated for the mass of the Haitian population by an average 130 per cent increase in the price of petroleum products at the beginning of the year. This resulted in soaring inflation that reached 40 per cent by March 2003, causing real hardship for all but a tiny elite.

## The burden of historic debt

One of the foundations of Haiti's current economic problems lies in its historic debt to France. As part of the negotiations to achieve international recognition, in 1825 Haiti agreed to pay reparations to France to the tune of 150 million francs in gold. France had demanded these costs to compensate it for the costs of the war and also to pay the former plantation and slave-owners for losses. This move by France was supported by the United States, which was still a slave-owning nation and anxious to ensure that it maintained its right to own slaves. (The United States, despite itself being a republic, was one of the last countries in the region to recognise the new nation.)

At today's prices, with three per cent annual interest, this would amount to US\$16 billion (or approximately UK£10 billion). Coming so soon after achieving its independence, Haiti could not afford to pay such a large sum, and the new and fragile government was forced to take out a 24 million franc loan from private French banks to start repaying the debt. By the end of the century repayment of this loan and its interest was running at 80 per cent of the national budget. By the time Haiti had paid its debt to France in 1922 it was firmly trapped in the role of debtor nation, and the economic repercussions of this are still felt today.

The situation was compounded in the 20th century by the three decades of corrupt Duvalier dictatorship. Forty-five per cent of the current international debt was contracted by the Duvalier family. Today Haiti's external debt stands at over US\$1.2 billion with an estimated US\$60 million annual cost of servicing the debt (ie paying interest on it). In 2001 this represented more than twice the government's expenditure on public health, three times the expenditure on education, and over four times the spending on agriculture. Seventy-five per cent of this debt is owed to the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank (Miles, 2003).

## Political instability

Haiti is also hidebound by its political history, which has been mired in violence and confrontation. For almost 200 years there had been no peaceful transition of power between democratically elected leaders. It was not until February 1996, when Jean-Bertrand Aristide took over as president from Rene Preval, that the country had its first democratic transition of power. Indeed, in the years from independence in 1804 up to the time that 'Papa Doc' Duvalier seized power in 1957, of Haiti's 34 presidents, 22 were overthrown and seven were assassinated or committed suicide in office. Up to 1915 only one Haitian president had completed his term of office. It was not until 1990 that the first democratically elected president, Aristide, came to power.

A rapid succession of prime ministers in the 1990s has further compounded the problems, with government programmes failing to get implemented because of the lack of continuity. At a legislative level the inability of parliamentarians to work together has meant that new laws fail to get passed, as the politics of confrontation triumph over the politics of debate and compromise.

## Lack of investment

Meanwhile successive governments' economic development plans have focused far more on urban areas than on the countryside where 65 per cent of the population live. Only about 20 per cent of government investments are focused on rural areas.

The state has virtually ignored agricultural development, providing minimal investment despite the fact that agriculture is one of the few areas of economic importance for the country, with the potential for providing employment for thousands of rural workers. Agriculture, forestry and fisheries represented one-quarter of gross domestic product in 2000/01, with the primary agricultural exports including coffee, cacao and essential oils (EIU, 2003a).

During the later years of the Duvalier regime, investment focused on development of the tourist industry and assembly plants. However, subsequent political and social instability, and a lack of the infrastructure available to serve a thriving tourist industry, have together meant that the international tourist trade has virtually dried up. By the late 1990s a mere 800 hotel rooms were available to tourists in Haiti (EIU, 2003a).

Following the restoration of democracy in 1994 the export assembly sector experienced a resurgence, mainly due to extremely low wages. Although the crisis of 2000 caused foreign investment in the sector to slow down, in 1999/2000 the assembly industry had accounted for 74 per cent of exports (EIU, 2003a).

## Problems of assembly plants and free trade zones

During 2003 a new free trade zone was set up near the Dominican border in the north-east of the country,

outside the town of Ouanaminthe. The first of three planned garment assembly factories owned by the Dominican company Grupo M opened in August 2003. Plans for the development of the free trade zone, sited on some of the most fertile plains in the area, envisage initially creating 1,500 jobs, and eventually over 21,000 direct jobs in 11 more factories (EIU, 2003b) and some 40,000 indirect jobs.<sup>1</sup>

By investing in the Haiti site the Dominican owners will make a massive saving in salaries, paying their Haitian factory workers a mere US\$1.75 a day at the end of 2003, compared to an average wage for a Dominican worker of US\$13 a day.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, investment agreements mean the foreign firms pay zero taxes to the state.

Apart from the not insignificant number of jobs created, the arrangement seems more beneficial for Dominican financial interests than for Haiti. Recent years of economic boom in the Dominican Republic – where 52 free trade zones with over 200,000 workers produce US\$4.7 million of products annually – have meant that Dominican export quotas to the US have now been reached. By either producing the entire product in Haiti, or adding the final buttons or adornments to the garments in Haitian factories, the Dominican entrepreneurs are effectively by-passing the US quotas: the garments reach the north American market with the label 'Made in Haiti' legitimately sown on them (Aneca, 2003).

Concerns about rights to labour organising within the free trade zones have been raised by Haitian trade unions and their international counterparts, as well as by local civil society organisations and international NGOs, including the British-based Haiti Support Group. In January 2004, the World Bank's International Finance Cooperation (IFC) committed US\$20 million to Grupo M to build the industrial park, after commissioning an investigation into workers' rights in the Grupo M plant in the Dominican Republic. As a result of the investigation's findings, the IFC made a remedial action plan part of the loan agreement with Grupo M. This included an agreement by the company to train all managers in all aspects of freedom of association and collective bargaining rights, create an ombudsman function to resolve disputes, appoint a social compliance officer to monitor compliance with labour laws and codes of conduct, and give clear written explanations to unionised workers who are laid off. The loan agreement will also contain specific covenants requiring Grupo M to adhere to its own code of conduct on freedom of association, and there will be unannounced annual compliance audits and a report to the IFC within one year on the progress made in implementing the remedial action plan.<sup>3</sup>

Although Haiti desperately needs foreign investment and job creation, the type of development envisaged in the border free trade zone will not lead to equitable or sustainable development. Low wages, curtailment of the right of workers to organise, lack of integration into the local economy, widespread potential environmental damage and little return to the state in the form of taxes

means that the benefits will be limited. As one foreign diplomat in the region is quoted as saying: 'Free trade and tourist zones are the final death of national development' (Aneca, 2003).

Haiti's international trade is heavily biased to imports, which run at three times the rate of exports, creating a massive balance-of-payments deficit. For 2003, IMF projections for Haiti's balance of trade show a US\$441 million deficit (EIU, 2003a). The main exports in 1999 were light manufacturing which earned some US\$296 million. Coffee was the main export crop earning US\$18 million, followed by cacao, essential oils, sugar and rice (EIU, 2003a).

## Foreign aid and investment

Following the political impasse caused by the disputed election of May 2000, most aid and international loans to the government were frozen or disbursed through non-government channels. From a high point of some US\$611 million income in international aid in 1994, for the fiscal year 2000/01 Haiti received only US\$189 million, a fraction of what had been promised prior to the political and electoral crisis.

In April 2001, the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), under pressure from the US, halted a package of loans amounting to US\$148 million for education, roads, reform of the public health system and for water supplies. On the back of this decision by the IADB a further US\$470 million in loans due to be disbursed in the up-coming years was also frozen. It was not until July 2003, after the Haitian government had paid US\$32 million in arrears to the IADB, that some of these loans were released. The payment of arrears, which made a large dent in the country's meagre foreign reserves, is a necessary step before the bank will make further loans available. The loans will be used for desperately needed social welfare programmes and infrastructure projects such as road building and water and sanitation services over a three to five year period.

The repayment of the arrears to the IADB was part of conditions insisted on by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) when it set up a one-year staff-monitored programme, which commenced in early 2003. In order to meet IMF conditions for a poverty reduction programme, Haiti had to first introduce a series of swingeing cuts to the national budget, such as ending fuel subsidies. In January 2003 these were eliminated, with the result that the prices of petrol, kerosene and public transport nearly doubled overnight. This has led to even greater hardship for the masses of poor, especially in urban areas, who rely on kerosene for cooking and buses to get them around the city. They have seen inflation rise on the back of these cuts in subsidies, meaning the prices they pay for everyday items have shot up, while wages for those lucky enough to be in employment have lagged behind.

By 2000/01, six major donors made up nine-tenths of international donors: the United States (37 per cent), Taiwan (16 per cent), United Nations agencies (15 per cent), the IADB (nine per cent), Canada (eight per cent) and the European Union (five per cent) (Gilhuis and

Hortensius, 2003). Between 2001 and 2002 the government of Haiti received no new multilateral humanitarian assistance from the IADB, the World Bank or the IMF. US bi-lateral aid has been reduced to a small trickle, with US\$73 million in 2001 for emergency food rations channelled through USAID to non-government organisations.

In January 2001 the European Union (EU) announced the suspension of aid money due to be disbursed under the European Development Fund and the suspension of direct budget aid (mainly affecting structural adjustment programmes and food aid) to the government of Haiti. It announced that the EU would redirect suspended funds to civil society: non-governmental organisations and the private sector. This would include support for measures designed to support democratisation and underpin the rule of law. At the beginning of 2003 the EU announced that it was renewing measures, made in 2001, to suspend aid to the Haitian government.

## External and internal migration

CIIR is now seriously concerned about the economic, social and political situation in the country. For millions of ordinary Haitians their lives are blighted by poverty, disease, lack of education and employment, and above all lack of hope. In December 2002 the United Nations Commission on Human Rights' independent expert on Haiti noted:

The greatest violation of the human rights of the vast majority of Haitian people is poverty ... The interdependence of civil and political rights and economic, social and cultural rights is an issue at the heart of everyday life in Haiti. (UNCHR, 2002)

The level of desperation is so deep that many families, especially in rural areas, are forced to send their children away. These children, known as *restavek* (stay-with), are virtually given away to better off families as domestic servants in exchange for board and lodging, clothing and supposedly education. A survey published by the Haitian National Coalition for Human Rights in 2002 (NCHR, 2002) estimated that up to one in 10 children from rural areas are forced into a *restavek*. Most of them live in virtual slavery and many are denied access to schooling or adequate healthcare. The situation is especially risky for girl children who risk sexual abuse by the men and boys in the household.

Another signal of the growing poverty of the rural areas was reported to CIIR in November 2003 by Pedro Ruquoy, a priest working in the bateys along the border area in the Dominican Republic (the bateys are villages near the sugar plantations in the Dominican Republic where Haitians and Haitian-Dominicans predominantly live). He noted that for the first time in 2003 they were seeing cases of young migrant workers coming from Haiti's Artibonite area. This is traditionally the richest and most fertile part of Haiti, providing plentiful opportunity for agricultural employment. However, with increasing rural poverty, lack of agricultural investment



and poor harvests due to a combination of mounting soil infertility, lack of rain and irrigation, the region cannot sustain its own population. As a result many of the young and economically active members of the population are now forced to look for employment outside the area.

Out-migration has continued to grow in Haiti, with over one million Haitians now living in the US and Canada (mainly Montreal, New York and Miami). For others, migration to the Dominican Republic or the Turks and Caicos islands represents a nearer geographical option. The situation in the Turks and Caicos islands (a British protectorate) is reaching a critical point, as the Haitian immigrant community now outnumber native islanders, and the government is consequently seeking ways to stem the tide of legal and illegal migrants. However, until the Haitian government, with the assistance of the international donor community, takes steps to address the economic situation and to offer Haitians viable alternatives, out-migration will continue. CIIR believes that the rich countries of the north, together with members of Caricom (the Caribbean Community), must support Haiti with aid and investment so that Haitian people can choose lives of dignity and fulfillment at home rather than being forced to migrate simply to survive.

For many families the difference between destitution and their ability to sustain a marginal existence is the remittances received by family members living abroad. According to a World Bank study in 1995, nine per cent of income of the poorest rural households came from overseas remittances. Overall remittances were estimated in 1995 to comprise some 10-15 per cent of the gross domestic product of Haiti (World Bank, 1998a). Today, an estimated US\$700 million is transferred back to Haiti annually in remittances, accounting for some 20 per cent of gross domestic product.<sup>4</sup>

However, although an estimated 29 per cent of rural

households have at least one member who has migrated, according to the World Bank study only eight per cent of rural households in 1995 received remittances from family members abroad. Of these, female-headed households received more than twice as much as male-headed households. Most remittances go to homes in the cities, with only a small proportion going to the rural areas where the poorest live (World Bank, 1998b).

For others, migration to the capital is seen as the only hope of survival. The capital, Port-au-Prince, is now growing at an alarming rate. In 1995, it was estimated that 13,000 people arrived every year in Port-au-Prince from rural areas. In 1982 the population was only 720,000; by 1995 this had grown to two million (World Bank, 1998a). As a result of their lack of economic means, the majority of newcomers are forced to live in the increasingly over-crowded and under-serviced shanty towns. An estimated 40 per cent of the population of Port-au-Prince live in inadequate housing and have no access to clean water (Oxfam, 2003).

Patterns of migration apply differently to women and men in Haiti. While it is primarily men who migrate from the villages in search of agricultural jobs in neighbouring countries, it is the women who migrate to work in domestic service or the tourism industry. Women also form the majority of street traders and those who buy and sell across the Haitian-Dominican border.

Another negative consequence of the migration – which started mainly due to political repression during the Duvalier years and increased in more recent years due to economic factors – has been a shortage of skilled labour. This is the case in both manual and professional sectors and has resulted in a high percentage of female-headed households. Currently women head some 36 per cent of households. This is higher than in other Latin American countries (although similar to other Caribbean countries, for example 44 per cent in Jamaica and 28 per cent in Guyana; World Bank, 1998a).

# Relations with the Dominican Republic

There is a long and complicated history of relations between Haiti and the Dominican Republic. For many years after independence and during much of the 19th century Haiti was the dominant economic and political power on the shared island. The Dominican Republic did not gain full independence from Spain until 60 years later than Haiti, in 1865.

Haiti occupied the Dominican Republic twice, once for a short spell in 1801 and subsequently for an extended period later in the century from 1821 to 1844. Under Haitian rule slavery was abolished in the Dominican Republic and conditions for the poor and down-trodden improved considerably. However, the occupation was understandably unpopular with the ruling elite who saw their position increasingly undermined, and it is their version of the occupation that dominates the history books of the Dominican Republic. Today the most lasting legacy of the occupation is a memory of brutality and suspicion.

Gradually, after the Dominican Republic gained full independence from Spain in 1865, the balance of power shifted towards the Dominican Republic as the Dominican economy forged ahead (based mainly on the leading cash crops of sugar, tobacco, coffee, and cacao) while Haiti's was mired down by corruption and a lack of internal and external investment. In the Dominican Republic, the years of the Trujillo dictatorship from 1930 to 1961 strengthened anti-Haitian feeling as Haitians living in the Dominican Republic were made scapegoats for the Dominican Republic's economic woes. A government-ordered massacre in 1937 which killed an estimated 3,000 Haitians and descendants of Haitians living in the Dominican Republic has left a lasting legacy of bitterness and mistrust on both sides of the border.

The situation of Haitian migrant workers who cross the border to work in the Dominican Republic is also a cause of strain between the two countries (see Wooding and Moseley-Williams, 2004). The Dominican Republic

expels some 26,000 Haitians every year, who are rounded up in what the Dominican government calls routine checks on the papers and documentation that the migrant workers carry.

Faced with such a situation, a number of organisations have got together on both sides of the border to address issues of human rights violations. However, although most of the initiatives at cross-border understanding have come from the NGO sector, in the last few years there have been increasing moves towards cooperation between the two governments. In the mid 1990s a bi-lateral commission was set up by the two governments to work together on such issues as sporting and cultural exchanges. This was echoed by a bi-lateral NGO initiative in November 2000 in Neyba in the Dominican Republic, with 600 representatives coming together. Their final declaration noted:

We propose a joint plan to overcome prejudices and to educate ourselves in a reciprocal process about our cultures and realities. In this perspective we propose a series of activities for academic and sporting exchanges, learning the languages used on our island and the development of a multilateral solidarity.<sup>5</sup>

In May 2001 the Dominican daily *Listin Diario* reported on an international symposium held in Oslo between civil society leaders, church leaders and ex-diplomats. The gathering noted that:

The difficulties which have impeded the two countries from sustaining harmonious and fruitful relations are due to internal and external factors which the two governments need to confront, and they need to establish social and economic policies which benefit their populations and permit the two countries to develop in mutual harmony.<sup>6</sup>

# The environmental situation

## Deforestation

Haiti is the most deforested country in the region. From an estimated 95 per cent of the country previously covered in forest there now remains a mere two per cent of tree cover. An estimated 15 to 20 million trees are disappearing every year. Twenty-five of the 30 major watersheds are almost devoid of cover (World Bank, 1998a). The implications of this for the country are alarming: vast swathes of the country are now reduced to scrub or semi-scrub land, rivers are drying up much earlier in the dry season, and any form of irrigation becomes impossible for many farmers, thus reducing agricultural productivity.

There are two primary reasons for this alarming deforestation. The first is that a majority of Haitians rely on charcoal for cooking. This requires a large amount of wood, and is one of the most environmentally inefficient ways of generating heat. Yet, despite the efforts of numerous NGOs to promote fuel-efficient stoves and alternative sources of energy, customary practices continue. For many rural people the difference between survival and destitution lies in selling wood for charcoal. Their primary concern is not environmental protection for tomorrow but the economic necessity of today. Commenting on this situation a representative of CIIR/ICD partner organisation Association des Paysans de Vallée (APV) said:

We're working as hard as we can to make people understand their commitment to the environment. But we also have to understand that people have economic problems, and difficulties to send their children to school. If they have 10 trees on their land and by cutting down two they could send their children to school for a year, what choice do they have?

APV, like many other NGOs, has a strong environmental protection component to its work. If someone in the community wants to cut down a tree the community has to investigate the proposal to see if this is agreed. If they are permitted to go ahead they must then plant 10 new saplings in its place.

However, initiatives like those of APV are a drop in the bucket. Solutions to address Haiti's environmental problems must come first and foremost through government leadership. Yet the government itself has been complicit in Haiti's environmental deterioration,

unable to show any real or innovative leadership and unable to address the root causes of the problem.

The second major reason for the deforestation has been commercial exploitation. This has been compounded by corrupt government officials at all levels who have permitted logging companies and private enterprise to fell vast expanses of forest. A further contributory factor has been Haiti's high population density, which is the second highest in the western hemisphere.

## Decreasing soil fertility

Much peasant cultivation is on steep mountainsides. Given the rain patterns in the Caribbean where rainfall is often torrential, erosion caused by inadequate agro-ecological practices often has a devastating effect on soil fertility. Today most of Haiti's rich topsoil is lost, having poured into the streams and rivers which feed the surrounding sea, where it now clogs the reefs and marine life and contributes towards the silting up of river estuaries. Added to this, increasing population pressure in rural areas means hillsides are left fallow for less time, thus decreasing soil fertility. This increasing population pressure also means that farmers are more likely to adopt personal survival strategies, such as felling a tree to sell for charcoal, rather than collective solutions, except in areas where there are active and effective local organisations.

Many of the rural development projects that have been set up in Haiti over the years have lacked any real integration into local conditions. As a result they have functioned as long as the outside organisation has provided funding, but few have continued once the funding expires. Unless projects adopt an integrated approach that addresses peasant farmers' immediate needs for greater income, efforts at environmental protection and soil conservation will flounder.

## Environmental impact of free trade parks

The government role in addressing environmental degradation in Haiti should be pivotal, yet due to lack of international aid, most of the early plans of the Aristide government have been abandoned through lack of funding. In 1999 the government approved a 15-year environment action plan prepared with widespread donor support, but because of the political stalemate

donor funds have dried up and implementation is stymied.

As a result, commercial exploitation continues unchecked by environmental concerns. A case in point is the development of a large scale free trade zone along the border shared with the Dominican Republic. This project, which envisages the development of 17 free trade parks, will see 'priority given to the construction of a privately-owned international highway connecting the port of Manzanilla in the north with the Cabo Rojo port in the south, and ... priority to tourist projects and the construction of industrial parks and private airports'.<sup>8</sup>

In April 2003 president Aristide of Haiti together with president Hipolito Mejia of the Dominican Republic inaugurated the first of the 17 free trade parks envisaged. It lies in the fertile Maribahoux plain, close to the Haitian border town of Ouanaminthe. The plain extends to some 73,000 hectares of alluvial soil and is traversed by the Dajabon river (known in Haiti as the Massacre river after the 1937 massacre of Haitian migrants in the Dominican Republic, many of whose bodies were subsequently dumped in the river). With its significant annual rainfall, this land, given adequate infrastructure, could produce some 36,500 metric tons of rice a year. This could feed some 500,000 people, and would go a long way towards closing the food deficit. In 1996 the national shortage of locally produced rice meant the country was importing 73 per cent of its rice, mainly from the United States (Abraham, undated).

In an analysis of the potential impact of the free trade zone project the Haitian NGO Plateforme Haïtienne de Plaidoyer pour un Développement Alternatif (PAPDA – the Haitian platform of advocacy for alternative development) identified the following negative effects (Abraham, undated):

- Over 500 hectares of prime agricultural land will be lost, instead of the 80 hectares originally envisaged. This will include the construction of roads, housing, restaurants, etc.
- Widespread deforestation will occur as trees are felled to make way for factories, houses, roads and other infrastructure.
- Under current production conditions (ie without technical assistance, infrastructure or adequate agricultural services) one hectare in the region of Maribahoux cultivated with a rotation of maize and rice currently produces an annual income of about 125,000 Haitian gourdes (around US\$3,000; cultivated with maize, beans, peanuts and banana it would generate 62,000 gourdes). For the 500 hectares lost this is an annual revenue of up to US\$1.5 million (although this amount would not all go to the peasant producers, as much is earned by the middle-men who market the produce).
- The accommodation needs of the thousands of Haitians who will flock to the area in search of employment will likely mean the unregulated construction of cheap housing on the outskirts of

the nearby town of Ouanaminthe. This housing will lack adequate sanitation and have the potential to create numerous social problems, including increased petty crime in the form of robbery, drug dealing and prostitution, as well as potential health problems due to the lack of sanitation, growth of mosquito breeding grounds in stagnant waters, and increase in rats and other vermin.

- Environmental risks are also present in the form of the eventual infiltration into the Dajabon river of organic pollutants from the factory effluent and from fossil fuels due to the likely increase in motor vehicles in the area. This puts at risk the water quality of the river and the flora and fauna that depend on it, as well as having a potentially polluting effect on crop production in the river basin. Without adequate protection there is a real risk of contamination of the ground water supply.
- Ground water supply will also be put under huge pressure from the increased demands of industrialisation in the area, which are estimated at some 50,000 extra gallons of water a day.
- Factory effluent could also lead to salinisation of the soil.

This project has been decided behind closed doors, without proper local consultation or a coordinated environmental protection plan. The potential environmental impact of this project is immense – and it appears to fly in the face of other efforts at environmental protection such as on-going efforts to protect the Dajabon river and re-forest the river basin. In July 2002 Haitian and Dominican Republic government officials participated in a conference, organised under the auspices of the United Nations Programme Against Desertification, which recognised the importance of protecting a number of rivers in the border area, including the Dajabon river. The UNDP provided funding in 2000 and 2001 for capacity-building for a local NGO working to protect the forests surrounding the Dajabon river source.<sup>9</sup>

The case of the Ouanaminthe free trade development is a classic example of the potential negative effects of weak government with no clear development plans or priorities. The zone lies close to vast stretches of land that are arid and semi-barren. With a little more planning and foresight these areas could have been utilised for the construction of the factories which will provide much-needed jobs, thus avoiding pitting different interest groups against each other.

The planned development should not have been agreed to by the Haitian government without adequate environmental impact studies. Furthermore, there has been no plan for the minimisation of risk. This type of development should take place only in the context of a national or bi-national plan for the development of the frontier region that envisages sustainable and integrated development.

# Agriculture

## Agriculture and the peasant economy

With a high population density most farmers in Haiti own small plots of land which are sub-divided each generation according to Napoleonic law whereby inheritance is equally divided among the off-spring. There is little land concentration and the average land holding is 1.78 hectares. A World Bank analysis of rural poverty published in 1998 found that 93 per cent of rural households had access to land – either owned via inheritance or purchase, rented, or share-cropped for absent landowners (often in the Haitian diaspora). However, 48 per cent of farms have less than 0.75 hectares of cultivated land. Only a tiny fraction of land-holdings are over 10 hectares. The analysis found that key determinants of whether a land-holder fell into the ‘most poor’ category were the distance of the land from the house (plots of the poor on average were nearly twice as far away from the homestead as those of the rich) and the level of education of the household head (World Bank, 1998b).

Current land tenure arrangements, although informal, function relatively well. Most farmers do not hold title deeds to the land they work. Peasants are more concerned with political and economic insecurity than with insecurity of tenure (Smucker, White and Bannister, 2000). Issues such as access to markets, school services, transport (particularly the major fluctuations in prices), devaluation, and increases in the cost of living, have a greater impact on peasants’ lives and their ability to engage in the market economy than their land tenure arrangements.

Much of the agriculture practised in Haiti is subsistence farming on marginal land which is mountainous and of poor soil fertility. Peasants have little or no access to credit. Only an estimated nine per cent of farmers benefit from formal credit facilities.<sup>10</sup> The poor state of Haiti’s roads, especially the secondary and access roads, makes access to even local markets difficult, let alone regional or national markets. In 1999, Haiti had only 720 miles of paved roads out of a total of some 3,000 miles of roads (EIU, 2003a).

In the absence of any significant state influence in the lives of Haitian peasants – either in terms of support for agricultural improvements or provision of loans – there is a long tradition of a high degree of sophisticated social organisation. Traditional groups operate in a horizontal structure based on mutual aid and support. Primarily these take the form of labour or credit exchange groups.

*Kombite* or work exchange plays an important role in the rural economy and has also provided an outlet for innovation and change: peasants who participate in these types of labour groups are more likely to adopt new technologies, experiment with new methods and participate in other collective actions, while outside influences, whether NGOs, peasant federations, missionaries or even the government, find it easier to begin their organising work building on existing social structures.

These mutual aid groups, however, go well beyond labour exchange and include such aspects of rural life as entertainment, religion, credit, and even secret societies. This complexity of social relations, especially in the rural areas, is one of the riches of Haiti, and something that is so often ignored in the focus on poverty and the intractable nature of the political stalemate.

## Impact of trade liberalisation

The lowering of import duties on agricultural products has had a disastrous effect on national production. Taxation on primary agricultural imports has been decreased from 50 per cent to three per cent and agricultural productivity has accordingly stagnated as Haitian farmers find it impossible to compete with cheap subsidised imports. The sudden slashing of the import tariffs was implemented by president Aristide as part of the Paris Plan. This was an agreement to introduce an economic structural adjustment programme which Aristide made with the United States and the multi-lateral institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF, as part of the condition for US support for his return to power in 1994.

Rice production is a stark example of the effects of commercial liberalisation imposed on Haiti by its creditors. In 1985 Haiti produced 125,000 metric tons per annum and imported only 7,000 from the US. By 2003 the amount of rice imported was 220,000 metric tons, making Haiti one of the US’s biggest overseas markets for rice. In 2003 the price of six pounds of Haitian rice was between US\$1.70 and US\$3.00 while the American ‘Miami Rice’ sold for a mere US\$1.40. National production plummeted to 83,000 metric tons in 1995; current production estimates put the figure at 30 per cent of peak annual production in the 1980s (Abraham, undated).

Coffee production, which at one time was the country’s principal agricultural export crop, has fallen

from a high of 300,000 sacks per year to less than 60,000.<sup>11</sup> Haiti now imports coffee along with other crops such as sugar, banana, cocoa and peanuts, crops which were grown in abundance in Haiti 10 years ago.

Another example of the devastating effects of opening up the markets of poor countries such as Haiti to the mass produced commercial products of more industrialised countries is the poultry business. While neighbouring Caribbean countries have up to 40 per cent import tariffs on poultry coming from overseas, in Haiti the tariff is some five per cent. Four years after Aristide's return to power, 10,000 jobs had been lost in the Haitian poultry industry. At its peak the chicken industry in Haiti produced six million birds and purchased thousands of tonnes of locally produced corn. Today the industry is virtually moribund as US chicken parts sell for \$2.50 compared to \$5.50 for a Haitian bird.<sup>12</sup>

## The need for a national agricultural development plan

Agricultural development in Haiti has suffered from the lack of a coordinated and properly implemented national strategy. As in so many other aspects of the national situation in Haiti, this is a missed opportunity which is having serious long term development consequences for the country. Without a national development plan for agriculture and the political will to implement it, the livelihoods and well-being of five million Haitians who live in rural areas and depend on agriculture for their survival are in jeopardy.

In 1996 PAPDA, the Haitian platform of advocacy for alternative development, called on the government to introduce a national plan for agricultural development (quoted in Abraham, undated). It proposed the following measures:

- fundamental reform which would favour the emergence of economically viable farming concerns based on a soil conservationist strategy
- allocation of a large scale decentralised credit programme for peasant farmers to facilitate their access to agricultural inputs, tools and equipment
- the rehabilitation and extension of irrigation systems
- improvement in post-harvest storage facilities and provision of appropriate and affordable on-farm grain storage equipment
- support for small scale processing projects (eg bottling, canning, jam making, etc)
- support for the development of potential export market crops such as avocados or mangoes
- the urgent application of a national energy policy that would protect the remaining two per cent of forest cover in the country.

The political upheavals of the 1990s, and again with the political stalemate since the 2000 elections, have resulted in international aid for agricultural development being curtailed. At the beginning of its term in office in 2000, the government had plans to irrigate some 40,000 hectares during its five-year term. In 2001, 5,600 hectares

were irrigated before the programme was halted because of a lack of international aid. Rice production has particularly suffered from the lack of international aid and investment. PAPDA has estimated that the irrigation of 80,000 hectares of cereals (primarily rice) would reduce the food deficit of the country by almost 70 per cent, which is equivalent to 350,000 metric tons of cereals (Abraham, undated).

Even at the most basic level of small improvements for peasant farmers in Haiti, it is noticeable that many farmers still practise traditional grain storage techniques such as hanging their crops from trees or storing them in the rafters of their homes. This is the result of many farmers' lack of access to credit to buy proper storage hoppers, or the unavailability of storage improvement projects in their area. It is estimated that one fifth of cereal production in Haiti is lost to post-harvest spoilage. Spoilage and lack of easy access to markets especially affects vegetable production, which has plummeted in recent years.

Peasant farmers in Haiti desperately need improved access to local markets to sell their produce. They need better feeder roads to give them access to nearby towns, and they need support in marketing.

The crisis in agriculture in Haiti in recent years has been exacerbated by the crisis in the alternative financial system, especially non-regulated savings cooperatives, which mushroomed in 2001 promising unsustainable monthly interest rates of up to 10 per cent. In 2002 the system collapsed and thousands of small producers and savers lost their money, reinforcing the vulnerability of small and medium-sized businesses.

## Food security

Haiti, along with Afghanistan and Somalia, is one of the three countries in the world with the worst 'depth of hunger indicator': that is to say, it has the highest calorie deficit per inhabitant and per day – some 460kcal/day deficit. Chronic food insecurity affects 40 per cent of households (UN OCHA, 2003). This means that over 2.4 million people are unable to purchase the daily requirement of 2,240 kilocalories to obtain adequate daily nutrition. It is not uncommon for many Haitian families to eat only once a day. Malnutrition is widespread in Haiti and an estimated 4.5 per cent of the population suffer from acute malnutrition (ratio of weight to height) while an estimated 28 per cent of children under five years old are underweight and 32 per cent are stunted (under height for age). Two-thirds of children aged between six months and five years old, and more than half of all Haitian women, suffer from anaemia.<sup>13</sup>

Local food supply only amounts to 55 per cent of need, while the rest is made up through large scale imports of cereals, primarily rice from the US. In 1998/99 food represented an estimated 29 per cent of imports (EIU, 2003a).

Recognising the crisis, the World Food Programme of the United Nations launched a country programme 2003-2006 for Haiti with a budget of US\$25.1 million. The

programme targets 23 priority municipalities and focuses on three main objectives:

- enabling young children and pregnant mothers to meet their nutritional requirements and nutrition-related health needs
- enabling poor households to invest in human capital through education and training
- enabling households that depend on degraded natural resources for their security to make a shift to more sustainable livelihoods.

The political upheavals of the first three months of 2004 have increased the vulnerability of many of the poorest Haitians. Many shops and food storage depots were looted in the aftermath of the departure of president Aristide and as a consequence food prices shot up. For many of the urban poor, who live by the day, selling their labour on a daily basis or working as street traders in the informal sector, even a few days of being unable to engage in these activities means their households can be tipped into destitution.

# HIV and AIDS

## Background

Haiti has the highest HIV national infection rate outside of sub-Saharan Africa. In 2001 it was estimated at 4.5 per cent. There are now some 250,000 HIV positive people in a population of only 8.2 million (UNAIDS/WHO, 2002). This high rate is closely linked with the nation's deep poverty and its socio-economic and political history in the last 25 years.

Haiti was one of the first countries to experience international stigmatisation because of AIDS. Some of the earliest diagnosed cases of AIDS at the beginning of the 1980s were among the Haitian population in New York. There nervous public health professionals seeking to explain the nature of this new condition identified the '4 Hs' as the high risk populations: homosexuals, haemophiliacs, heroin users and Haitians. As they sought to trace the epidemiology of the condition, public health experts initially speculated that HIV had been imported into the US from Haiti. At the time the Duvalier regime's response was to deny the existence of HIV and AIDS, dismissing these claims as yet another example of discrimination against Haiti. Thus the first seeds of the impending epidemic were sown.<sup>14</sup>

In contrast to the Haitian government's early stance on HIV and AIDS, courageous and concerned Haitian health officials and members of the medical establishment approached the situation quite differently. A group of them got together and formed Centre Gheskio, one of the earliest research centres on HIV and AIDS in the world. Lacking high tech facilities, their initial research was based on clinical evidence, as they gradually built up a clearer picture of the disease pattern of HIV and AIDS. As a result of this early identification of the epidemic in the country, the Haitian medical establishment has been at the forefront of the fight against HIV and AIDS. At the international level they lobbied hard to get Haiti taken out of the derogatory and unfounded so-called '4 H' group. Finally, in 1986, the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta withdrew Haiti from the high risk group.

## Epidemiological assessment

Although prevalence rates in Haiti remain the highest in Latin America and the Caribbean, the rate is no longer climbing at the alarming speed it did in the late 1980s and early 1990s. By 1998 there were signs that the rate was beginning to stabilise. The third round of HIV

surveillance carried out in 2000 on pregnant women at 12 sentinel sites shows a national prevalence of 4.5 per cent (with a range of between 2.1 per cent in the Nippes region and 13.8 per cent in the north-west). The level in urban areas was predictably higher at 6.7 per cent than rural areas with a level of 2.9 per cent. This compares with the 1996 study of nine sentinel sites that showed a prevalence of 5.9 per cent at the national level (UNAIDS/WHO, 2002).

The massive challenge now for public health officials is to ensure that this rate either continues to stabilise, or more importantly declines. As a UNAIDS briefing notes, this reduction in prevalence should be treated with caution, as there are no epidemiological surveillance or behavioural studies to show that it reflects preventative behaviour (UNAIDS/WHO, 2002).

In terms of the impact of HIV and AIDS, analysis of the causes of death (started with the collection of hospital death certificates in 1997) shows that AIDS is the leading cause of death at a national level. In 1999 a total of 7,997 death certificates were collected. AIDS was the primary cause of death, representing 5.2 per cent of the total; almost half of the certificates lacked a defined cause of death, and when the 4,146 certificates with a well-defined cause were assessed, 10 per cent of them show AIDS as the cause of death. Among women aged between 15 and 49 AIDS is the leading cause of death, accounting for 20.5 per cent of deaths with a well-defined cause (UNAIDS/WHO, 2002).

In 2001 an estimated 30,000 people died of AIDS, and some 200,000 orphans in Haiti had lost their mother or father or both parents to AIDS by the end of 2001 (UNAIDS/WHO, 2002). To date the total number of people with AIDS in Haiti has reached 196,000, and according to projections could reach 400,000 by 2006. It is estimated that nationally AIDS has shortened life expectancy in Haiti by nine years (ONUSIDA, 2002).

Initially HIV infection in Haiti was predominantly among the homosexual community. This has now changed, with HIV infection being more predominant among heterosexuals. What started as a mainly male infection (5:1) is now almost equally affecting men and women (0.8:1).<sup>15</sup>

An estimated 30,000 of pregnant women are seropositive and there is a 30 per cent mother-to-child transmission rate. Of these infected children, 90 per cent die before they reach five years old (Gilhuis and Hortensius, 2003).

As elsewhere, sex workers are particularly at risk of HIV



infection. According to WHO/UNAIDS statistics, the last reliable research on this sector of the population, undertaken in the late 1980s in urban areas, showed a seropositive level of 50 per cent of those tested. Today that level could be as high as 78 per cent (Gilhuis and Hortensius, 2003).

## HIV and AIDS and poverty

In common with other countries with a high HIV and AIDS prevalence rate, AIDS is primarily a problem of poverty and under-development. In order to understand the epidemiology of HIV and AIDS in Haiti it is necessary to understand the nature of health care provision in the country. In common with other sectors such as education, the state is surprisingly absent from service delivery. An estimated 40 per cent of the population has no access to basic health care. Over 60 per cent of health care is delivered by the non-profit sector: NGOs and missionaries. A tiny two per cent of service delivery is carried out by the private for-profit sector (servicing the country's small wealthy elite). Government services account for less than 40 per cent. The majority of the population use what is known as 'popular medicine' or traditional healers and traditional birth attendants.

HIV and AIDS treatment and prevention now represents the single biggest drain on the national health budget. An estimated 50 per cent of hospital beds are occupied by HIV and AIDS patients (Gilhuis and Hortensius, 2003).

The level of sheer poverty of so many Haitians means that people have to look to whatever solutions they can find in order to maintain their families. It is not unheard of for teenage schoolgirls to go to study in the daytime and in the evening practise an informal type of prostitution in order to gain a little income for their families. Women with children may do the same, often with the tacit acceptance of their partners.

Furthermore, as in other countries, powerful myths grew up about AIDS in the early years of its evolution, which because of a lack of adequate education and communications have been hard to counteract. In a country which has strong cultural beliefs about rewards and punishments for behaviour, it has been a long slow process to convince people that AIDS is not a curse which is visited on one as a punishment for wicked behaviour. This kind of attitude has led people to believe that there is nothing they can do to protect themselves because whether or not they will contract AIDS is down to past behaviour, not because they do not practise safe sex. However, there is evidence that these attitudes are changing: a study in 2000 found that 80 per cent of women and 83 per cent of men aged between 15 and 49 correctly rejected the two most common local misconceptions about HIV transmission or prevention and knew that a healthy-looking person can transmit HIV (Institut Haitien de l'Enfance, 2000).

## Indications of a success story

In the face of such a dearth of government health

provision as in Haiti, it is impressive that the country has actually been able to halt the rapid increase in prevalence rates. This is due to a number of factors.

Firstly, aggressive public health education campaigns aimed at prevention have been carried out, mainly by NGOs. Messages have been geared towards the promotion of safe sex and condom use, postponement of first sexual encounters, and working with women to strengthen their self-esteem and ability to negotiate with their sexual partners in order to insist on condom use.

Secondly, condom use has been aggressively promoted and has accordingly massively increased. In the 1980s only a few thousand condoms were sold commercially nationwide per year. In 2001, with subsidised and free distribution systems in place in many parts of the country, and aggressive promotion carried out by a variety of NGOs, some 12 million condoms were sold or distributed.<sup>16</sup> Although this figure of 12 million is low for a population of over eight million people, the growth in condom use has nevertheless been dramatic. A survey in 2000 showed that as many as 80 per cent of the youth population now know about transmission of HIV, and what steps should be taken to reduce risk. However, the same survey showed that only 6.6 per cent of women and 32.6 per cent of men aged between 15 and 19 said they used a condom the last time they had sex (Institut Haitien de l'Enfance, 2000). With 60 per cent of the population under 24 years old, unless there is more coherence between knowledge and practice among this age group, there is a real danger of renewed growth in HIV infection rates. It is this age group that must be the target for policy makers.

The third factor which has contributed to the stabilisation of the incidence of HIV and AIDS is that the government has treated HIV and AIDS as a multisectoral issue, not just one of health or indeed poverty. The government under president Aristide placed considerable emphasis on HIV and AIDS prevention and the First Lady took up the issue as a particular concern. A national coordinating committee was set up which includes the ministries of education, justice and health as well as a cross-section of NGOs. The committee plays an important role in promoting the inter-agency coordination and cooperation which is essential to successfully combating the spread of the epidemic.

Fourthly, for such a poor country it is notable that there are a number of small centres of excellence which have treated people living with HIV or AIDS, whatever their socio-economic status or ability to pay.

Another positive development in 2002 was that Haiti became one of the first countries in Latin America and the Caribbean to benefit from the UN Global Fund for AIDS programme, when some US\$65 million was committed to Haiti over five years for prevention and treatment. The fund will concentrate on three areas: HIV and AIDS prevention, treatment of people living with HIV and AIDS, and prevention and treatment of tuberculosis.

Before the UN-funded programme started, of the 250,000 seropositive people in the country, only 300 had received anti-retroviral drugs. Under the UN-funded

programme this will increase to between 3,000 and 6,000 per year. Although much of the emphasis of this programme is on treatment, there is also considerable attention to public health campaigns aimed at halting the spread of the infection. In order for Haiti to truly benefit from this large injection of funds for HIV and AIDS work it will be essential that it is targeted where it is most needed: in the populations most at risk, and in services which directly benefit people living with AIDS.

## The actors

Apart from the UN Global Fund the major donors in the fight against HIV and AIDS in Haiti are USAID, the Canadian International Development Agency and Cooperation Technique Francaise. Although the Bush administration included Haiti in a US\$1.5 billion pledge to fight AIDS in 2002, up until the departure of president Aristide in February 2004 it refused to release aid to support public health services in Haiti. How soon these funds will be released remains to be seen.

Likewise European Union aid for public health in Haiti was frozen in 2000 because of the political situation. In mid 2003, the Inter-American Development Bank released four humanitarian loans to Haiti that had been approved in 1997 and 1998. These included US\$22.5 million for the reorganisation of the health sector and US\$54 million for potable water and sanitation programmes.

The incredible feat of slowing the rate of new infections in Haiti has been achieved despite the lack of international aid to the Haitian government, and despite the lack of resources faced by those working in the health field. It is a tribute to the vision, hard work and sheer determination of the small group of Haitian medical people who started working on HIV and AIDS. This has now grown to become a large body of people working for NGOs, missions and community organisations as well as

in health posts throughout the country.

The largest and most important of the Haitian organisations working on HIV and AIDS is the Centre Gheskio led by the charismatic and visionary Dr Jean William Pape, who has been a leading figure in this work since the early 1980s. There are also a number of smaller NGOs such as Poz Sida which provides telephone help lines for people living with AIDS, and the Zanmi Lasante Biomedical Centre in the central plateau of Haiti, where the 300 people who have received anti-retrovirals have been treated.

## The churches and AIDS

In recent years the churches in Haiti have taken steps towards addressing the AIDS crisis, and many have set up their own programmes of public education and care for people living with AIDS and AIDS orphans.

Speaking about the role of the churches in October 2003, the Director General of the Ministry of Health, Dr Emile Herald Charles, told CIIR that the government welcomed the churches' work in the field of HIV and AIDS. He noted that their education and prevention campaigns promoting abstinence, fidelity and postponement of sexual activity among youth play a positive role in the fight against AIDS. He also noted that in informal talks, the government has asked that the churches do not denounce the government's promotion of condoms as part of a strategy of HIV and AIDS prevention, so as not to undermine the efforts of other institutions.<sup>17</sup>

Caritas Haiti devised in 2003 an ambitious five-year strategic plan for its AIDS work which envisages HIV and AIDS education taking place in every Catholic school in the country, education work with Catholic youth groups and women, pastoral care for AIDS orphans and those sick with AIDS, and promotion of the rights of people living with HIV and AIDS.

# The political situation

## History

Independent Haiti came into being 200 years ago, in January 1804, after a long and bitter 13 year struggle by slaves against French colonial rule. Having overthrown the French colonial rulers the rebels then had to defeat the largest force ever to have crossed the Atlantic at the time – some 22,000 troops dispatched by Napoleon Bonaparte in an attempt to recapture the valuable colony from the black rebels. Led by the ex-slave Toussaint l'Ouverture, and then after his capture and subsequent execution by the French in 1803 by Jean-Jacques Dessalines, they also had to rebut an attempted invasion by Spanish colonists, a British expeditionary force and a mulatto coup. CLR James in his classic book *The Black Jacobins* writes of this event:

The transformation of slaves, trembling in hundreds before a single white man, into a people able to organise themselves and defeat the most powerful European nations of their day, is one of the great epics of revolutionary struggle and achievement. (James, 1989)

In the months immediately after victory Dessalines, encouraged by an English agent with offers of protection and trade agreements, sought to consolidate independence by killing all the white French citizens who had stayed in the country. The mass of the population who were not in the army were forced back on to the land and Dessalines refused to set up education systems, noting that: 'The labourers can be controlled only by fear of punishment and even death; I shall lead them only by these means; my moral code shall be the bayonet.' The more enlightened general Alexandre Petion, on the other hand, who ruled in the south of the country following Dessalines' assassination in 1806, established schools and land redistribution.

Today the heroes of the independence struggle and the early founding fathers are the national heroes that all can agree on. Names like Toussaint l'Ouverture and Jean-Jacques Dessalines, Henri Christophe and Alexandre Petion are part of everyday parlance in Haiti. Streets, villages, schools, clubs, children are named after them. Their myth and their glory live on, and Haitians are rightly proud of their past.

Yet behind this notable achievement is a complexity which set the stage for modern day Haiti's problems. These leaders were indeed exceptional men, men

prepared to sacrifice and die for the ideal of freedom, men able to inspire others to risk all, and men brave and daring in their tactics. Yet like so many successful military leaders, the independence leaders lacked the knowledge or experience to build and run a nation state.

The character of the nation's birth gave rise to its style of carrying out business and undertaking politics in the country. The divisions between the poor black majority and the educated and privileged mulatto minority alongside a small black elite, which the early leaders were never able to overcome, have been a theme running through Haitian national life. An early land reform programme under president Petion began to distribute small plots of land in 1809 to the black-majority freed slaves. However, much of the best land was given in large swathes to Petion's mulatto supporters who represented the dominant class. As time progressed these landowners found it increasingly hard to employ the labour of the small farmers who were content to work their own subsistence plots rather than sell their labour. As a result the mulatto class gradually turned their attention to trading and improving their positions within the army and government structures. Corruption became a recognised way to accumulate wealth and the rift between the interests of the poor black majority on the one hand, and the increasingly privileged mulatto and black minority elite on the other, deepened.

Today Haiti still carries the legacy of the early years of independence and the ensuing years when rivalries and political power struggles were settled by means of force. Even 200 years later, there is often a strong tendency to attempt to settle disputes by resorting to force or intimidation rather than negotiation: opposing sides often seek to violently stifle the protests of their opponents instead of looking for the middle ground. This is true at both the individual and community level. Most recently this tendency has been reflected in the political deadlock of the last two years where government and opposition were unable to reach a compromise or work together for the greater good of the nation.

Commenting on this situation the United Nations Human Rights Commission independent expert noted in his report in December 2002:

Since independence Haiti has been ruled by a succession of authoritarian and dictatorial regimes and a culture of democracy and human rights has struggled to make any lasting impact on political and social practices. Hence the inadequacy, not to say total

lack, of a real 'state culture' among many political leaders and top government officials. (UNCHR, 2002)

## The Aristide years

Former priest and populist leader Jean-Bertrand Aristide became president in 2000. From a high point of popularity in the late 1980s and early 1990s, by the time he was deposed at the end of February 2004 there were few apologists for his rule. Most of the progressive political classes had long since become disillusioned by Aristide's inability to address the needs of national development. His main supporters were to be found among members of his own party, Fanmi Lavalas, and a segment of the people living in the popular neighbourhoods. Many in the popular movement had also become disillusioned with his inability to deliver improvements in their lives. His more middle class supporters likewise saw a decline in their standards of living combined with a failure by the government to address the key economic and social issues facing the country. The level of distrust between government and civil society had sunk so low that by the time Aristide departed there was little dialogue between opposing sides.

Although the media under Aristide was relatively free in Haiti, with a high level of illiteracy in the country few people read newspapers and their influence is relatively minor. This is also true for the television stations. There are five television stations in Haiti but only about 30,000 TV sets. Generally television news reporting is pro-government, and there were close links between several of the television stations and the Aristide government. This was not the case, however, with the radio stations, which have by far the biggest coverage in Haiti and consequently the widest influence. It is estimated that five million Haitians listen to the radio on a daily basis,<sup>18</sup> and although not all of this is to news reporting, the coverage is extensive. There are about 50 radio stations broadcasting to the Port-au-Prince area. By the beginning of 2004 all the most important ones were firmly in the anti-Aristide camp, and of those that broadcast news their coverage was consistently anti-government. Many of the radio station owners are members of the Association of Media Owners, which was itself an important member of the opposition coalition Group of 184 (see below); the president of the Association of Media Owners owns the largest and most popular radio station, Radio Metropole.

Under Aristide government corruption became widespread – although in the context of the country's history, and specifically the Duvalier regime, which siphoned off millions of dollars of national treasury money into Swiss bank accounts, it is not surprising. In 2003 Haiti was rated the third most corrupt country in a survey conducted by Transparency International. The Global Corruption Index, which included 133 countries, put Haiti behind only Bangladesh and Nigeria (Transparency International, 2003). (However, this data should be regarded with some scepticism as data and statistics in Haiti are scant and unreliable, and this kind

of information, collected from the international financial institutions and the Haitian Chamber of Commerce, cannot be judged politically impartial.)

The cost of the government bureaucracy became a major drain on the national budget. With many fictitious or superfluous posts awarded to family, friends and political cronies, much government money that should have been used for social spending or the implementation of development projects or infrastructural improvement was essentially misspent.

## The role of the state

Haiti has traditionally had one of the weakest state apparatus in Latin America and the Caribbean. Most basic services that in other developing countries are carried out by the government are performed in Haiti by NGOs, grass roots organisations, private enterprise or missionaries – or, as is often the case in reality, simply do not exist. According to a World Bank study there are some 10-20,000 NGOs operating in Haiti at the community level. Eighty per cent of schools in the country are run either by NGOs or private for-profit institutions (World Bank, 1998b). The state has never played a major role in education: indeed the 2001 national budget envisaged spending a mere US\$20 million on education, for a population of more than eight million (Miles, 2003). The same is true in health care, where government provision accounts for less than 16 per cent of all health care spending, amounting to only 5.6 per cent of gross national product. There are only 2.5 doctors in Haiti for every 10,000 people and 90 beds per 100,000 of the population (Gilhuis and Hortensius, 2003).

Mission organisations have always played a key role in the delivery of basic services in Haiti. While this is far from ideal in a modern nation state, in Haiti it must be placed in the context of an almost destitute government lacking in basic infrastructure, modern institutions or the finance to address issues of good governance, fiscal reform or improved local administration. Before this situation can change, deep structural and attitudinal changes will need to take place in Haiti. At the most fundamental level, the types of checks and balances which can more effectively ensure that government functions more transparently must be put in place. These include a better trained and transparent judiciary as well as the improved functioning of local-level judicial mechanisms. The same applies to the police force and to parliament.

## Background to the ousting of president Aristide

The roots of the political stalemate which gripped Haiti for nearly four years go back to alleged vote rigging during the elections in May 2000 for the 83-member lower Chamber of Deputies, 19 Senate seats, and several thousand local mayoral posts at the municipal level. Fanmi Lavalas won 18 of the 19 contested Senate seats

and 72 of the 83 seats in the Chambers of Deputies. It also won most of the local government posts.

Although international observers at the time declared the polling to be in the main part free and fair, the vote tallying procedure used by the Conseil Electorale Provisoire (CEP, Haiti's Provisional Electoral Council) to calculate the results was flawed, and doubt was cast over the legitimacy of the victories in 10 Senatorial seats. Under Haitian electoral law the winning candidate must take over 50 per cent of total votes in order to win in a first round. However, the CEP awarded the seats to the candidates if they achieved 50 per cent of the votes cast for only the four most popular candidates. As a result international observers from the Organisation of American States (OAS) eventually concluded that eight of the Senate seats should have gone to a second round run-off.

The day following the elections the opposition parties declared the elections rigged in favour of the Fanmi Lavalas candidates, and a week later called for a boycott of the second round of voting. The Haitian government initially refused to review the disputed seats and the OAS withdrew its election observers before the second round in July 2000. Later that year, in November, Aristide was overwhelmingly elected president in an election boycotted by the Convergence Democratique opposition parties and without the presence of international support, either for funding or monitoring the elections. International aid was then suspended until the political crisis is resolved.

In an effort to resolve the crisis, president Aristide asked the eight senators to resign so that new elections for their seats could be held. Although the seven members of the Fanmi Lavalas party did resign, the eighth senator refused. The government did agree to hold new elections for seven of the contested seats and bring forward the date of other elections. However, the Convergence Democratique refused to accept these concessions and the situation remained in stalemate.

For three years the OAS attempted to mediate a solution. In September 2002 the OAS General Assembly passed Resolution 822 which set the framework for elections in 2003. It included urging the government to undertake a disarmament programme, and provided a framework for the creation of a new CEP including representatives from the Convergence Democratique, Fanmi Lavalas, other political parties, churches, the judiciary, human rights NGOs and the business sector.

The US and the European Union stated that their financial re-engagement with the Haitian government was dependent upon the fulfillment of the commitments made by the government under OAS Resolution 822. These included:

- strengthening of democratic institutions, especially the police and judiciary
- formation of a new electoral council (CEP)
- establishment by the CEP of an Electoral Guarantees Commission
- development and implementation of a comprehensive disarmament programme
- reparations to victims and prosecution of

perpetrators of violence on 17 December 2001 when an attack on the National Palace resulted in violence and reprisals

- restoration of a climate of security
- movement forward in investigations for politically motivated crimes.

On 12 January 2004 the term of office of one third of the Congressional Representatives ran out, effectively ending the parliamentary mandate. In the absence of a fully functioning parliament, but with the political crisis gaining momentum, president Aristide began to rule by decree.

For many of those who previously supported Aristide, the sense of disillusionment and betrayal is deep. They felt that Aristide had stolen the dream of a better Haiti and turned it into a nightmare where only a few benefit. They witnessed the increasing depth of poverty and misery into which the country continued to descend, and they could see no alternative but for the government to resign and hold new elections.

Yet in the rural areas, and for many of the masses of poor in Haiti, it remains hard to shake off the dream that Aristide represented when as a young charismatic priest 20 years ago he spoke out so courageously and inspiringly against the Duvalier dictatorship, the corruption of power and the need to work on the side of the poor. Based in the parish of Saint Jean Bosco in the shanty-town district of La Saline, Aristide represented a beacon of hope, not just for the poor, but for people throughout the country who saw the need to pull their nation out of the misery of poverty, injustice and underdevelopment caused by years of dictatorship, oppression and corruption under the Duvaliers. Preaching liberation theology, his powerful populist discourse won him supporters not just inside Haiti, but internationally, where he became a well-known figure, touring the US and Europe in his efforts to build opposition to the dictatorship. For many of the poor, despite the fact that he was unable to deliver improvements to the quality of their lives, Aristide remained their president. In the complicated mix of factors which characterise Haitian society race and class intertwine. Aristide was a black man who came from a poor family, and he did not represent the mulatto interests of so many of his predecessors.

Increasingly during the last months of Aristide's government national politics became characterised by conflict and confrontation and an inability by the major players concerned to compromise to find a solution to the political impasse. In May 2002 the disillusionment of many in Haiti was expressed in a strongly worded statement issued by the National Episcopal Justice and Peace Commission in Haiti. Under the title 'Must it always be the people who pay the price for the country's divisions?' the statement noted:

Since the presidential election in November 2002 the country is just going backwards. The people are tired of this endless crisis. National economic production has declined and the country is more or less dependent on imports. The high cost of living is

unbearable. Every day citizens die trying to cross the seas to find a living in another country ...

The politicians deceive us and involve us all in their political manoeuvres. Instead of examining their consciences they accuse each other, each of them regarding themselves as in the right and the others in the wrong. The internecine struggle between politicians is the cause of much suffering among the general population. The innocents pay for the guilty. People are ever more divided. The population feels it is abandoned. Two years since the elections, it is not only a question of political and civil rights. The people cannot live any more. The entirety of cultural and socio-economic rights is being trampled underfoot, and there is no hope of things improving ...

Why do our politicians in Haiti regard the country as a cake to be divided up among their supporters? Does the crisis benefit them? We cannot understand the role of the international community which calls itself the 'friends of Haiti'. Whose friends are they? Are they the friends of the people exhausted because development aid is denied them and the state structures have practically crumbled? Are they friends of the people who depend on NGOs who give them charity? Is the whole thing designed to discourage the people from believing in elections so that it will be easier for some foreign schemes to be implemented? What is the economic and political project that the international community is defending during this crisis?

On the eve of 2004, 200 years since our independence, our people have the right to live in dignity.<sup>19</sup>

## Opposition to Aristide

Broadly speaking, the opposition to Aristide was organised around three major groupings which in the last months of his presidency called themselves the Democratic Front. The longest established grouping was the political parties organised into the Convergence Democratique, a coalition of 15 small opposition groups and political parties formed after the May 2000 elections. They range from groups with a social democratic leaning to ex-Duvalierists. Most of them had little in common beyond their opposition to the Aristide government. Although the coalition managed to achieve a measure of credibility among foreign diplomats involved in the attempts to broker a solution to the political impasse, it does not enjoy mass support around the country. It is far from clear that if it came to power it would represent the needs and aspirations of the mass of poor in Haiti. Although the Convergence Democratique has been since 2000 a fairly major power broker in the attempts at finding a political solution, in the last months of the Aristide presidency it played an increasingly intransigent role, moving the goal-posts each time its demands were met.

Although the Convergence Democratique remained the most widely recognised opposition grouping, especially internationally, during 2003 an increasing

number of other civil society opposition actors came to the fore, with protests organised by trade unions, victims of police brutality, peasant groups and even former soldiers. Notable among the protest movement of the last months of the Aristide government were student movements. Many of the protests were met with widespread intimidation and violence by police and Fanmi Lavalas government supporters, something which has further fueled polarisation in the country.

The third major grouping within the Democratic Front was an amalgam of business sectors, some media representatives and intellectuals, which came together in January 2003 to form the Group of 184. This group actively campaigned throughout the year, and managed to achieve widespread publicity for its manifesto of demands despite repeated intimidation by pro-government supporters. Led by wealthy US-born businessman Andy Apaid, it was more of a business-led response to the dire economic and political crisis facing Haiti than a real political alternative to either the Convergence Democratique or Fanmi Lavalas, and lacked any coherent political manifesto. It also benefited from having many journalists and media owners among its supporters.

However, although the level of popularity of the government and the ruling Fanmi Lavalas party declined dramatically after the May 2000 elections, Fanmi Lavalas's ability to dispense government patronage meant it managed to maintain some allegiances, especially among some sectors in the poorer neighbourhoods. With a weak local government structure, meaning that the local municipalities have few funds for local development initiatives, the ability of the local ruling party to access funds from central government can prove decisive in winning allegiance.

Political events moved quickly in the last months of 2003 and early 2004 as opposition demonstrations became increasingly frequent and the anti-government media whipped up this growing national sentiment. The Aristide government reacted by repressing opposition and there were increasing numbers of reports of violence and intimidation of opposition activities. However, the decisive factor in the overthrow of president Aristide proved to be the arrival in Haiti of a number of ex-military, and ex-FRAPH paramilitary in January 2004. These men, many of whom had been living in exile in the Dominican Republic and the United States, began a military operation in the north of the country to oust Aristide. Without them it is unlikely that the civil society opposition could have overthrown Aristide in a 'peaceful revolution'.

On 29 February 2004 Jean-Bertrand Aristide was forced from office after a three week military campaign and increasing pressure from the United States government to resign. In his place a transitional government was appointed with the figurehead role of president taken by the Supreme Court chief justice, Boniface Alexandre. An interim prime minister, Gerard Latortue, was appointed. The new caretaker government will make preparations for elections to be held within the next year.

In the meantime the new government faces a

mammoth task of rebuilding the fractured nation and creating national unity. The polarisation of political allegiances which has taken place in recent years will need to be handled carefully. The presence of a number of ex-military, such as rebel leaders Guy Phillippe and Louis Jodel Chamblain, who are convicted human rights abusers with suspected links to drugs dealing, will prove an added challenge for the new government which must be careful not to make allegiances with known criminals.

There are many elements within Haiti, most notably among the leaders of the military coup and their business supporters, who would like to see the Haitian army reconstituted. But Haiti is not under threat of war and does not need a force to defend its national sovereignty. Such a move would represent a regressive step for the country, and would entail the diversion of much needed

resources that could be better spent on national development. What Haiti needs most in this respect is a competent and professional police force which could guarantee law and order. During the Aristide years the small and under-resourced police force suffered from corruption and division, and a lack of adequate training. Furthermore it operated in the absence of a functioning and effective judicial system. Unless the new government also addresses issues of human rights violations and widespread impunity for human rights abusers and those accused of criminal acts there will be no real security for the Haitian people. Added to this must be a comprehensive disarmament programme to disarm both the pro-Aristide gangs as well as the anti-Aristide irregulars and the armed insurgents who overthrew the government.

# Conclusion

A year before the crisis of January 2004, a draft internal document from the United Nations Office of Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Early Warning and Contingency Planning Unit wrote:

There is a need for strong advocacy in favour of the Haitian cause, so as to raise increased awareness on the imminence of a major humanitarian crisis, and to raise the country's profile in the international community's agenda. (UN OCHA, 2003)

The document went on to list many of the issues which have been outlined in this report. A visit by CIIR in October 2003 to Haitian partner organisations reaffirmed many of these concerns about the precarious nature of existence for the majority of the Haitian population.

Although the immediate political crisis in Haiti has been solved, the need for national reconciliation is a priority. The international community must now work to support the new government to bring this about. It must also urgently examine ways it can support Haiti's national development, for example by giving Haiti preferential terms in trade and aid. Haiti must be given the opportunity to develop its agriculture, its tourist industry, and its manufacturing so that the economy can

start to grow. The rural economy needs investment through support not just for agriculture, but for micro-enterprises at the village level. Ways must also be found to stimulate the national market and infrastructural improvements are urgently needed. The Haitian state requires support to enable it to provide the right conditions for the social, economic and political security that the Haitian people need. If not, they will continue to be driven to sell their children as indentured servants, migrate in dangerously unseaworthy vessels, or chop down every tree on their land to provide income for schooling or health care for their children.

As this report shows, strategies adopted by the international community up to now have had devastating effects on the vast majority of the Haitian people. The state in Haiti must be strengthened to enable it to reform, transform its role and become an agent for sustainable, equitable growth and development that is people-centred and pro-poor. The state must be able to channel the aspirations of its population and provide a setting in which the Haitian people can meet what are essentially the aspirations of people the world over: to have access to employment which provides them and their families with a decent standard of living, and to live free from fear in a safe and healthy environment.



# Recommendations

Recommendations to the British government, the European Union and the International Community:

- 1 The British government should urgently establish a bilateral aid programme to Haiti, based on its own guidelines that prioritise the world's poorest countries. Donors such as the British government should also continue to fund non-government organisations in Haiti, but should make renewed efforts to support organisations which represent the majority, not a narrow band of the private sector. Close knowledge of such organisations in a country like Haiti is only possible with the permanent representation in Haiti of an office of the Department for International Development.
- 2 The European Union should release all the aid earmarked for Haiti which was frozen because of the political crisis. It should prioritise environmental protection and sustainable agriculture, as well as health, education and support for micro-enterprises in the rural areas. It should also examine ways in which it can fund urgently needed infrastructure projects, primarily highways and rural roads.
- 3 International donors should prioritise the creation and support of good governance processes in Haiti, and work with the government, the civil service, local government officials, the police and judiciary to provide training and support. The international community should urgently support efforts at legal reform in Haiti, particularly in reinforcing judicial structures at provincial level and in rural areas.
- 4 Government managerial and administrative capacity should be reinforced, to enable it to take over greater service provision, especially in the areas of rural health and education. Efforts to decentralise government and build local participatory democracy must be supported by international aid to train both local government officials and civil society groupings in rural areas, so that they can participate in defining their own local development needs.
- 5 Rural development should concentrate on infrastructure improvement to provide better access to markets for peasant farmers. This should include funding for primary and secondary road building and development of access roads. Improvements in rural storage facilities are also vital, as is support to rural micro-enterprises. International aid should also include support for capacity building for small farmer organisations in such areas as production within a sustainable agricultural context, environmental protection, marketing, and organisational development.
- 6 This report has documented some of the devastating effects of international trade policies on the people of Haiti. With a population of over eight million, Haiti is potentially the third largest market in the Caribbean (after Cuba and the Dominican Republic). A stable and viable economy in Haiti is essential not just for the wellbeing of its own population, but for the regional stability of the Caribbean. Unless Haiti can meet its population's aspirations for jobs and economic stability hundreds of thousands of people will continue to migrate to nearby countries. International trade rules should be amended to allow the Haitian economy to grow, and for the country to address issues of equitable, sustainable development. The British government, and other member states of the European Union, should take a lead in advocating for this.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Haiti Support Group press release, 26 June 2003.
- <sup>2</sup> Personal interview with Charles Arthur, director of the Haiti Support Group.
- <sup>3</sup> IFC Haiti project funding goes ahead despite investigation's 'mixed results' – article dated 3 February 2004 on the Bretton Woods Project website, [www.brettonwoodsproject.org](http://www.brettonwoodsproject.org).
- <sup>4</sup> Haiti: coup attempt exacerbates crisis – article dated 24 December 2001 on the Oxford Analytica website, [www.oxweb.com](http://www.oxweb.com).
- <sup>5</sup> Quoted in an unpublished project proposal dated 26 September 2003, prepared for Bohio, an internet network on Dominican Republic/Haiti border issues.
- <sup>6</sup> *Listin Diario*, 20 May 2001, p7a.
- <sup>7</sup> Interview with the author in Vallue, Haiti, October 2003.
- <sup>8</sup> Translated by the author from the Spanish declaration of the trilateral cooperation agreement between the government of the Dominican Republic, the government of Haiti and the government of the United States, quoted in Aneca, 2003.
- <sup>9</sup> Haiti Support Group press release, 26 June 2003.
- <sup>10</sup> Statement issued by the Haitian Platform for Food Security on the occasion of World Food Day, 16 October 2002.
- <sup>11</sup> Unpublished position paper on food sovereignty of the Europe-Haiti NGO network, November 2003.
- <sup>12</sup> Jane Regan, 'Some areas really miss tariff', in the *Miami Herald*, 17 December 2003.
- <sup>13</sup> Report of the executive board for the World Food Programme (WFP/EB.3/2002/8/3, page 5) containing the programme 2003-2006 for Haiti.
- <sup>14</sup> Personal interview with Dr Eddie Genece, director of the Haitian NGO Poz Sida, September 2003.
- <sup>15</sup> As above.
- <sup>16</sup> Personal interview with Dr Jean Hugues Henrys, October 2003.
- <sup>17</sup> Personal interview with author.
- <sup>18</sup> Personal interview with Charles Arthur, director of the Haiti Support Group.
- <sup>19</sup> Translated and posted on the Haiti Support Group website, [www.haitisupport.gn.apc.org](http://www.haitisupport.gn.apc.org).

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# Haiti 2004

The year 2004 – the 200th anniversary of the founding of independent Haiti – should have been a year of celebration for this troubled nation. Instead, unable to break free from the legacy of its difficult and violent past, Haiti is once again in the grip of a deep political, economic and social crisis.

In the face of widespread poverty, failed government and an under-performing economy, CIIR is concerned about the ability of the vast mass of Haitian people to simply survive in the country today. This CIIR briefing examines the background to that situation, outlines the grave humanitarian crisis facing the Haitian population, and makes recommendations for international action to assist Haiti to build a better future for its people.



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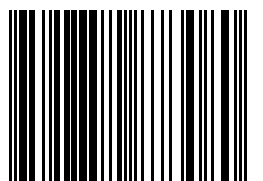
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