



**DEATH AND DEVASTATION IN HAITI:  
AGAIN HURRICANES OF HISTORY AND NATURE**

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**DR. MAULANA KARENGA**

The devastation is almost unimaginable, but in some ways reminiscent of Katrina, and yet so different from the damage done by Ike in Galveston. This is so not only because of the human casualties and general cost, but also because of the structured inadequacy of aid and a government without adequate capacity to intervene, to rescue the stranded, save the drowning, feed the hungry, provide water to the thirsty, housing for the homeless, help for the injured or even answer the questions of the people and assure them that within a certain period of time their houses and neighborhoods will be raised and rebuilt again. Hit hard and mercilessly by four major storms and hurricanes in less than a month, the people of Haiti have suffered as many as 1,000 people dead, tens of thousands injured, and an estimated one million, some say five million, homeless.

Gonaïves, Haiti's third largest city, was cut off by the collapse of a major bridge and the people left stranded for days without food, water or alternative shelter. Much of the city was under water and an estimated 80% (240,000) of its residents were displaced. Moreover, hospitals, schools and other vital institutions were destroyed; crop fields were flooded and eroded, forecasting an increased problem of food adequacy and security in the future. Talk of possible famine has entered conversations and the future of aid and its adequacy are uncertain.

For most Americans, the state of Haiti and the life-conditions of its people are not high on the list of morally considerable and politically significant subjects, even though the U.S. has tied itself to Haitian history through its own long history of embargoes, inva-

sions, interventions, political isolation and coups. Indeed, a great part of Haiti's problems stem from its forced "relationship" with the U.S. Thus, even before the recent hurricanes of nature, the hurricanes of history and society, the savage, destructive and devastating realities of oppression, injustice, domination and wars of various and vicious kinds, had already left Haiti damaged and vulnerable, unable to readily confront and successfully cope with the hurricanes that arise from the sea and wreak havoc over the land. Note how even before the arrival of the storms, human rights advocates and groups had charged the U.S. with withholding money approved by the Inter-American Development Bank to repair and rebuild some of Haiti's water and sanitation systems and to provide clean drinking water to Haiti in order to compel Haiti's compliance with its wishes concerning the politics and economy of the country. Not only is this a violation of principles of non-intervention in the affairs of member states, it is again an immoral and inhuman act against the people of Haiti.

Haiti is the last country in the hemisphere that the U.S. continues to need to dominate, disrupt and degrade in such a brutal and open way. Its use of Brazil to do its "wet work", its bloodletting, under the auspices and unconvincing cover of the U.N. does not in any way camouflage its role in the hurricane-like devastation and disruption of Haitian life in collusion with France and Canada. Not only has it gutted the government, overthrowing, kidnapping and forcibly taking President Jean-Bertrand Aristide from Haiti, the U.S. has helped impose an economic regime of "structural adjustment" that has destroyed Haiti's agriculture and turned

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it in less than two decades from a country that was food sufficient to one which is a dangerously dependent importer and debtor. It has forced Haiti to give up rice growing and import it and then has made it so expensive that it's beyond the reach of the masses, provoking food revolts and demonstrations against these and other impositions which not only have destroyed Haiti's agriculture, but Haitian lives. Indeed, these impositions—privatization of national wealth, cutting of social services, land seizures, forced imports, and structural dependency as an overall policy is called the "death plan" by Haitians.

Moreover, added to all this devastation and disaster by nature and human design, the U.S. is still busy deporting Haitians back to Haiti, in spite of the tragedy and crisis that envelops the country. This increases stress and strain on the political community and economy, cruelly interrupts remittances Haitians send home to support their families and add to the economy, and forcibly returns thousands back to a land already devastated and unable to provide food, homes and jobs to the people. Haitian advocacy groups have asked all people of good will who believe in freedom, cherish justice, and hate human suffering to send a letter to Bush and your congressional representatives asking them to stop deportations to Haiti and grant Haitians Temporary Protected Status. This will prevent unnecessary added stress on the country, insure continued aid to Haitian families thru remittances (among the highest of any national group), and allow time for rebuilding the country to insure a safe and successful return and reintegration into the life and

work of the country. No matter what excuse is given for not granting TPS, it must be seen and labeled as arbitrary, unfair and racist, and we must build a strong voice and movement to insure its granting.

George Bush has stated recently that he will send an extra \$1 billion to Georgia, a Black Sea country on the border of Russia—to court and keep close an ally in oil and opposition to Russia. But he has agreed to send only \$10 million to Haiti, half of which is diverted from other forms of aid previously committed to other projects. It is at best a miniscule amount for the massive emergency work of relief and repair necessary to stem the tide of suffering, sickness and famine and help rebuild in even a minimum and meaningful way the lives and land of the people the U.S. government has helped to destroy.

Finally, we as African people, sharers and stakeholders in the legacy of struggle for human freedom which defines and honors the history and people of Haiti, owe them our active solidarity and support. Even as we write this, hungry, homeless and harassed by an invasive army budgeted for \$500 million per year, the Haitian people have chosen to continue to resist. They block roads, defy and fight running battles with the mercenaries masquerading as peacekeepers, demonstrate against the inaction and non-independence of the current government, and demand the return of their democratically elected leader, President Aristide. Indeed, they have lifted up a light that lasts, and we who share their history and aspiration for the future, know its name is freedom-in-and-thru-struggle.

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