



**JUSTICE IN HAITI:  
RESISTING DESIGNS OF DOMINATION AND DEPENDENCE**

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**DR. MAULANA KARENGA**

No matter how much money is collected and spent in Haiti; no matter how many projects are proposed and put in place and no matter how much international aid is offered and accepted in various forms, Haiti will not be free, self-sufficient and sovereign unless the people of Haiti, themselves, are empowered and are massively and meaningfully involved in rebuilding their lives and country and self-consciously recover the spirit and space of liberation which first brought them into being. This spirit and space of liberation, if read rightly, becomes an important way to understand and genuinely respect the people and their capacity to create a true realm of freedom, push their lives forward and open a horizon of possibility and promise for future generations. In a word, Haiti must conceive its own freedom and future and struggle to bring them into being.

Eventually, the fundraising concerts will come to an end, the cameras will be cut off and the media will move to other things and the will to donate and the empathy that prompts it will ultimately exhaust themselves. For although empathy for other humans is key to the outpouring of donations and concern for Haiti, it is not enough to sustain the long and difficult struggle necessary to free the Haitian people from centuries of domination, deprivation and degradation by internal and external oppressors, nor recover from this recent natural and unnatural disaster that has devastated the country.

To truly stand in serious and sustained solidarity with Haiti, those committed must move from general human empathy to respect for the rights and dignity of the people and an active and ethical partnership

with them in this awesome work and struggle before them. Again, empathetic identification with the poor, the less powerful and the suffering is a human tendency and value, but a genuine respect for the rights and dignity of a people must accompany it if it's to be more than an initial concern that changes over time into indifference or contempt.

To respect a people is to value them not only as human beings, but human beings with a unique and equally valuable way of being human in the world. It is, especially in the case of Haiti, to respect its history, the struggle and record of the people to free themselves and bring themselves into being as a nation and to sustain themselves with an unsurpassed resistance, resilience and resourcefulness against such powerful internal and external oppressors.

The question of respect for the rights and dignity of the Haitian people is nowhere clearer than in the issues surrounding the recent rash of adoptions of Haitian children and lifting them out of Haiti. First, it raises the ethical issue of exploiting the increased vulnerability of parents in extreme conditions of poverty and disaster. But even if these adoptions were carried out in normal or better times, it would still raise ethical issues of removing children from their homes and communities and taking them to foreign and racialized lands instead of building the capacity of Haitian families and communities to care for their own. Moreover, it does not consider the serious psychological effect this has on the families who wish to raise their children and have relations with them even as they stay in an orphanage or in the homes of others. And it raises the ethical issues of massive adoptions

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without proper vetting and subjecting Haitian children to the vicious market and practice of sex-trafficking in children and enslaved child labor. Again, respect requires capacity-building of the people, not taking advantage of their vulnerabilities.

Furthermore, there can be no rightful rebuilding of Haiti without respect for the people's capacity to govern themselves, rebuild their economy, draw effectively upon the rich resources of their culture, best nurture and care for their children and restore democracy for which they have struggled so hard and long. Haiti does not need the U.S.'s militarizing and monopolizing the country, blocking access of other countries and flying around doing reconnaissance in the midst of disaster while countries like Cuba, Venezuela and China had already setup hospitals and delivered food, medicine and other necessities and continue to help Haiti in ways the U.S. seems reluctant to do.

A righteous rebuilding is not achieved by donations, loans and investments that increase others' dominance and Haiti's dependence, but by educating, mobilizing and organizing a whole people and putting them to work in building the just, good and sustainable society they all want and deserve. Indeed, as Frantz Fanon contends, it is key to realize that "the masses are equal to the problems which confront them", that it is not enough even for a few hundred to discuss and decide upon a plan, "but that the whole people plan and decide, even if it takes twice or three times as long". For it is not just about building things, but also and especially, about building the people and about respecting and "treating the worker as a human being".

Thus, human empathy and respect for the rights and dignity of the Haitian people must be joined with an ethical partnership in which Haitians take the lead in reconstructing their own lives and land. Indeed, the corporate and closed-meeting talk of a new Haiti with a new economy, a new political culture, new buildings, bridges and beautiful parks will not produce a new Haiti, but an artificial Haiti, shining on the outside, but internally sick from the pathology of domination and dependence imposed by international corporations and their local collaborators.

The talk of modeling Haiti's rebuilding on that of Japan and Germany, out of the ruins and rubble of the European Second World War, must, again, take into account the involvement of the masses at every level. And this rebuilding must not simply be constructed around tourism, but around a sustainable agriculture, a restored democracy with President Aristide and Lavalas in their rightful and hard-won place, and a balanced development of technology and industries which serve the people first and others afterwards. Also, it must insure, as Fanon says, that "Women will have exactly the same place as men, not (simply) in the clauses of the constitution, but in the life of everyday, in the factory, at school and in the parliament". Indeed, "the living expression of the nation is the moving consciousness of the whole of the people; it is the coherent, enlightened action of men and women". And in this context, not only is justice achieved, but the people and the land are healed and restored and flourish in their fullness.

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Dr. Maulana Karenga, Professor of Africana Studies, California State University-Long Beach, Chair of The Organization Us, Creator of Kwanzaa, and author of *Kawaida and Questions of Life and Struggle*.  
[[www.MaulanaKarenga.org](http://www.MaulanaKarenga.org); [www.Us-Organization.org](http://www.Us-Organization.org) and [ww.OfficialKwanzaaWebsite.org](http://ww.OfficialKwanzaaWebsite.org)]