



**STANDING IN SOLIDARITY WITH HAITI:
BEYOND NATURAL AND UNNATURAL DISASTERS**

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DR. MAULANA KARENGA

In the midst of the unimaginable devastation which has struck the people of Haiti, we embrace them as brothers and sisters, share their suffering and severe loss and stand in steadfast solidarity with them as they move forward to bury their dead, heal themselves, recover those still lost and trapped and rebuild their lives and country. And we pause to pay homage to the many thousands dead, reaffirming the uniqueness and equal worthiness of each of their lives, and as Anna Julia Cooper teaches, “the unnaturalness and injustice” of all forms of inequality and oppression.

Let us also praise the people of Haiti for their resilience in the face of this horrific heart-rending devastation. It is a legendary and life-sustaining resistance rooted in their earliest struggle for liberation in the historic and world-impactful Revolution of 1804 and tempered in ongoing struggles against internal and external oppressors and repeated natural and unnatural disasters over the centuries.

Let us also give praise to the Haitian people for the concern, kindness and loving care they have shown each other, to those who, although wounded themselves, went to answer the calls and cries of those trapped and began to dig with their bare and bleeding hands to free them, in the spirit and practice of *konbit*, an ancient African ethical practice of collective work and responsibility called *Ujima* in Swahili, *dokpe* in Fon, and *aaro* in Yoruba. It is this culturally-rooted and spiritually-rich value which will surely be at the heart and center of Haiti’s struggle to overcome this tragedy, rebuild itself and forge a new future for its people.

We are all Haitians in this time of fundamental tragedy and turning, and are challenged to carve out of this hard rock of reality something meaningful and enduring, something to honor the dead, uplift the living

and forge a good future for those yet to come. Indeed, Haiti is a metaphor and model for the human struggle for freedom, justice, security, peace and well-being in the world, a morally-compelling shared project for all of us.

However, if we are to work with the Haitian people in a dignity-affirming and life-enhancing way, it is important to establish at the outset that Haiti’s vulnerability to natural disasters, poverty and conditions of extreme and extended suffering and misery are not of its own making. Nor is it rooted in their religion nor comes from the command of heaven, but is anchored in more earthly realities, like history and human evil and oppression. Indeed, Haiti was born in revolutionary and triumphant resistance to one of the greatest evils of human history, the Holocaust of enslavement. This righteous resistance was a contribution to expanding the realm of human freedom, an uplifted light for the enslaved and oppressed of the world, and a warning to their enslavers and oppressors.

It is for this audacious act of freedom which Europe and her descendent countries decided to punish and extract payment from Haiti thru blockade, boycott and isolation. France, whom Haiti defeated, and its allies, forced the people of Haiti to pay reparations for freeing themselves, to retroactively ransom themselves from an enslavement the Revolution had abolished. Morally obscene in its conception and absurdly irrational in its reasoning, it was devastating in its impact, bankrupting the country and starting it on the long journey of sustained and deepening poverty, disempowerment and unnatural disasters.

Thus, Pat Robertson’s comment that Haiti’s massive devastation is due to the people’s “pact to (sic) the devil” is no more than a sick and morally savage racist rant. Indeed, Haiti’s devastation and suffering are

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not because they made a pact with the devil, but because they defiantly resisted the work and ways of the devil—enslavement with all its physical, psychological and sexual forms of domination, deprivation and degradation.

At the dawn of the Revolution, the revolutionary leader and Voudon priest, Dutty Boukman said, “The god of the white man inspires him with crime, but our God calls upon us to do good works”. Here Boukman suggests that the White oppressor worships the god of wealth, power and oppression. But he says that Haitians worship the God of the universe, who calls on them to do good works, to free the enslaved, and right the wrongs of the oppressed, the weeping and the suffering, a clear parallel teaching to classic Christianity easily perceived by those not willingly blind. Furthermore, the Haitians are predominantly Christians, but even those who are not Christians have no more obligation to be Christians to be worthy of respect and human concern than do Jews, Muslims, Maatians, Buddhists, Ifans, Hindus et al.

The U.S. itself has special responsibility for the current conditions of Haiti, beginning with its support of France, racial hatred of Haiti, and fear of the effect of its Revolution on enslaved Africans in the U.S. and the Americas. It invaded and occupied Haiti from 1915-1934 and seized its land and assets; rewrote the Constitution to facilitate corporate exploitation of its land and labor; and propped up and armed dictators to plunder and “pacify” it. Moreover, the U.S. imposed on Haiti disabling policies of aid and trade which

further weakened the economy and increased poverty; demanded the closing of public schools and reduced the capacity for civic and human services; destroyed agriculture, precipitated deforestation and drove the people into the cities, especially Port-au-Prince, laying the ground for this massive devastation and Haiti’s lack of infrastructure to deal with it. And it undermined Haiti’s fledgling democracy, overthrowing twice Haiti’s democratically-elected President, Jean Bertrand Aristide, and collaborating in excluding his party, Lavalas, the largest in Haiti, from participating in elections. It is now greatly increasing its military presence in Haiti, and offering more debilitating loans and structured dependence mixed with medicine and self-congratulatory myths.

Thus, only a serious solidarity in struggle will save Haiti from oppressors posing the unnatural as normal and dictatorship as developing democracy under U.S. tutelage. Indeed, solidarity in struggle, as President Aristide says, is “a recognition that we are all striving toward the same goal, and that goal is to go forward, to advance (and) to bring into this world another way of being”. In this new way of being, we will one day be able to witness a new Haiti in which the people are truly free, secure and at peace, where the forests and fields flourish again; the water runs clear and clean again; and the sun rising will be a sign not only of a new dawn, but also of a relit and uplifted light of human freedom and promise in the world.

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