

## Imagine Haiti...

What is the Meaning of Genuine Solidarity for the People of Haiti?

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Theme: [Poverty & Social Inequality](#)

In-depth Report: [HAITI](#)

*Excerpt from the speech delivered by Jean Saint-Vil (Jafrikayiti) at Imagine Haiti, a fundraising event held at Ottawa's Art Court, February 15, 2010*

*Onè!*

*Ainsi annonce-t-on sa présence chez le paysan haitien qui, sans faute, vous répondra: Respè!*

*Je vous dis donc : honneur-respect !*

In the wake of the devastating earthquake, which struck Haiti on January 12th, genuine solidarity for the people of Haiti has become even more critical. This tragedy has provoked a strong reaction of compassion among millions of people around the world, all sharing a desire to help and to offer support for meeting the urgent needs of the Haitian people.

*Depi nan Ginen, bon Nèg ap ede Nèg! Solidarity is indeed a universal value.*

*La solidarité humaine date en fait, du temps ou nous fûmes tous dans les entrailles de l'Afrique-mère.*

*Afin de mieux comprendre le contexte du 12 janvier 2010, revisitons un geste solidaire posé le 14 janvier 1804*

*Liberté où la mort! Gouvernement d'Haiti*

Quartier général, le 14 janvier 1804, première année de l'indépendance d'Haiti.

*Le gouverneur-général, considérant qu'un grand nombre de noirs et d'hommes de couleurs supportent, aux Etats-Unis, toutes sortes de privations, parce qu'ils n'ont pas les moyens de retourner en Haiti, décrète qu'il sera compté aux capitaines de navires américains la somme de quarante piastres pour chaque individu qu'ils pourront ramener dans le pays. Ce décret sera imprimé, publié, aussitôt expédié, et une copie en sera immédiatement envoyés au Congrès des États-Unis.*

Indeed, barely days after the creation of the Republic of Haiti, Jean-Jacques Dessalines published a decree in which he announced his intention to devote part of the nation's meager post-war budget to securing the emancipation of formerly enslaved human beings. Many American slave ship captains collected the 40 dollars payment Dessalines had reserved for the release of each formerly enslaved person who sets foot on Haitian soil. Dessalines also offered Haitian citizenship to soldiers from Poland and Germany who were brought to Haiti as part of Napoleon's army.



American physician and author Paul Farmer commented in 2003 that the Haitian Revolution was “a giant step for mankind”.

Not everyone shares Dr. Farmer's view. In 1805, French foreign minister Prince Charles Talleyrand wrote: “the existence of a Negro people in arms, occupying a country it has soiled by the most criminal acts, is a horrible spectacle for all white nations.” The United

States responded by banning trade with Haiti in 1806. The embargo was renewed in 1807 and 1809. Later, in 1825, with the help of other white powers of the time, France began extorting a ransom which would eventually amount to 90 million gold Francs from the young Black Republic.

For several years, racial slavery would persist everywhere in the Americas (including right here in Canada), save Haiti. When she provided shelter and assistance to Miranda (1806) and Bolivar (1815, 1816), Haiti's sole request was that all enslaved Africans be freed wherever the South-American revolutionaries would be victorious. Haitians were often accused of fueling anti-slavery rebellion in the Americas. Routinely, European powers would send warships to intimidate and collect ransom from them, on account of suspected Haitian complicity in uprisings happening in the region. Despite the collective punishment through repetitive acts of extortion (dubbed "gunboat diplomacy") that the crippled Black Republic suffered at the hands of its historical racial enemies, late into the 19th century, Haiti was still making notable, albeit suicidal, contributions to human dignity and freedom. Few people know for instance that José Martí, founder of the Cuban State, was provided a Haitian passport to facilitate his revolutionary travels. It is believed that, in fact, Martí died a Haitian citizen.

Fast-forward to January 2010...

The Canada Haiti Action Network is deeply concerned about the observable trends in Haiti since the earthquake. We are expressing our concerns to the appropriate authorities. We will urge upon them the following principles to guide the aid and reconstruction effort in Haiti, and we invite you to do likewise.

1. Respect for Haiti's sovereignty and a Haitian-led crisis response and reconstruction - Clearly, any meaningful reconstruction and development process in Haiti will require a central, decision-making role for its government and social organizations, and a dedicated and well resourced effort to build, re-build, and greatly expand Haiti's public sector and governmental capacity. All pressures on the Haitian government from the Government of Canada and other "Friends" to privatize Haiti's public enterprises must finally be ended.

2. Opposition to militarization of relief and humanitarian assistance - The fact that Haiti was already occupied by a 9,000 strong Security Council-sanctioned military force did not stop the United States government from quickly dispatching 2000 marines, and seizing Port-au-Prince airport. As is now widely known, this military control has been a major reason for the failure to reach in a timely way vast numbers of earthquake victims with urgently needed relief supplies and medical aid.

The obsessive foreign concern about "looting" and "security" has ultimately proved to be inaccurate and an impediment to the relief effort. The relief activities must be demilitarized, and they must be fully coordinated and overseen by the Haitian government and its agencies. All foreign NGOs and agencies should be put at the service of these local

authorities, and should assist them to build the appropriate structures, as needed.

3. Demand for absolute and unconditional debt cancellation for Haiti - Under the circumstances of the earthquake crisis, there can be no justification for Haiti sending vitally-needed funds to foreign banks.

4. Support for the settlement of the international debts owed to Haiti - The serious inadequacy of Haiti's infrastructure, and its dire economic circumstances are significantly the result of the coercive imposition of another odious "debt" on Haiti - that of the so-called "Independence Debt" that the Government of France demanded of Haiti, as payment for the loss of property that Haiti's revolution of independence caused to the French slave-owners who had ruled colonial and slavery-based St. Domingue. The Government of Haiti spent 122 years sending enormous sums (billions of dollars) to the French government as compensation for these "losses". The immorality of this extortionate debt has always been clear to the people of Haiti. The earthquake crisis has now exposed the ruinous economic and developmental legacy of this "Independence Debt" to the entire world. In the wake of the disaster, it is irrefutable that natural justice requires that these funds be returned.

*(Dans deux jours, le Président français, M. Nicolas Sarkozy, se rendra en Haiti. Souhaitons qu'il ne souillera point l'honneur de sa nation en débarquant sur l'île les mains vides tandis qu'on l'y attend avec la restitution tardive d'au moins 40 milliards de dollars (U.S.) que l'Etat Français extorqua du peuple haitien, sous la menace des armes et de remise en esclavage, entre 1825 et 1947).*

5. An appeal for immediate adaptation measures by Immigration Canada - The federal government must immediately recognize the dramatically changed circumstances faced by the Haitian community in Canada, and those in Haiti needing access to family, support, and medical care. Such measures must include the extension of eligibility for family sponsorship to siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins and adult children and temporary waiver of sponsorship application fees (as has been applied in comparable emergency situations). The admissibility rules for family reunification must also include the issuing of temporary-resident permits to allow the processing of such cases in Canada rather than in Haiti, as has been established in Haiti's tiny Caribbean neighbour state of Antigua.

"there were nine million people in Haiti before the earthquake. There are still nearly nine million people in Haiti today.

*On February 20, join us in person at Ottawa's Bronson Centre, or connect via live webcast from 7 pm EST to 9 pm EST as we partake in a special fundraising event titled AYITI VIVAN (Haiti is Alive). Please go to [www.akasan.org](http://www.akasan.org)*

VIV AYITI POU TOUT TAN GEN TAN!

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