

# Media Disinformation regarding Emergency Relief in Haiti

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As predicted and feared, the media coverage from Haiti has shrunk at the very time that people there are facing their most serious challenges—how to survive the aftermath of a disaster which has become a permanent feature of their environment.

It's not just the physical destruction, and rehabilitation challenges for people who have lost family members and limbs. It's not just the daily challenge of finding food, water and housing. There are deeper problem of finding and nurturing hope in the success of a long term recovery.

We have gone from hearing reports of massive casualties and social needs to a focus on 10 Americans being indicted for child snatching. Once again we have become the story just as the misnamed "We are the World" is revived. It may be another example of what Ishmael Reed calls "fading to white," a play on the Fade to Black phrase that TV insiders use to end every recorded show.

In a sense, the indictment of the American missionaries by the Haitian government—which has not yet included a charge for child trafficking—is a reassertion at its authorities when we are hearing voices on CNN and in policy circles faulting the devastated government for not doing enough. Not only are they still there, and reasserting but they are launching a high-profile case against Americans, something symbolically important for a retaining the support of Haitians who are furious (but not very vocal for obvious reasons given their situation) with the US response. This case gives them a high profile way of challenging the aid effort.

At the same time, there are serious problems affecting many more children not getting blitzed on TV. Example: the Washington Post reports:

"An American doctor working in a triage tent in the courtyard of the State University Hospital of Haiti said Tuesday that child illnesses "connected to crowding" there are growing. He cited meningitis and intestinal disorders exacerbated by the heat and a shortage of food and clean water.

"They're outside. There's inadequate shelter," said Rashid Kysia, a Chicago emergency room doctor. "When you crowd like this, you get diarrhea and dehydration. They can't catch up."

One Haitian lawyer said, "Haiti needed 14,000 doctors and the US sent 14,000 soldiers," said one Haitian lawyer who also noted that American planes are circling the island with loudspeakers telling the people not to think about leaving the Island and coming to the United States because they will be detained and returned.

Contrast this with an offer by the President of Senegal who is suggesting that African states set aside land and resources to encourage Haitians, many of whom were taken as slaves centuries ago, to repatriate to Africa. Poor African countries are sending money and help as well. Continuing assistance from Cuba and Venezuela remains underreported.

And what of the principal relief effort that we have seen on TV where millions of dollars have also been raised to help?

“You can walk down many of the streets of Port au Prince and see absolutely no evidence that the world community has helped Haiti,” writes Bill Quigley on Common Dreams.

“Twenty-three days after the earthquake jolted Haiti and killed over 200,000 people, as many as a million people have still not received any international food assistance.

“On February 4, the UN World Food Program reported they had given at least some food, mostly 55 pound bags of rice, to over a million people. The UN acknowledges that it still needs to reach another one million people. The 55 pounds of rice are expected to provide a two week food ration for a family. Beans and cooking oil are scheduled to come later.

The Associated Press reported that people in Haiti at small protests were holding up banners reading “Help us, we’re starving.” Over a million people are displaced. About 10,000 families are in tents, the rest are living under sheets, blankets and tarps.”

Slowly, criticisms of the Aid effort have come out even as the morality play around the orphans rivets public attention. England’s respected medical Journal The Lancet carried a blistering attack on the delivery of aid indicting “the aid industry.” The Daily Mail reported:

“The [Haiti](#) earthquake relief operation faced scathing new criticism yesterday after aid organizations and U.S. forces were accused of being involved in a ‘vanity parade’ to show solidarity with victims.

In an astonishing outburst, Guido Bertolaso, the head of [Italy](#)’s civil protection service, claimed there was a lack of leadership in the aid operation and criticized American forces for having no training in running a major civil relief program.”

No wonder many Haitians are anxious, angry and alarmed. Paul Jay of the Real News spoke to Ronald Charles, a Haitian PhD student in Toronto:

PAUL JAY: Now that the UN mission led by Brazil, the aid mission mostly dominated by the US, has kind of taken over the country, it’s going to kind of be in their hands where political power ends up. Does it go back to the six families that (controlled Haiti? Or is there any institution that’s created that’s actually democratic? I suppose the people are going to have something to say about this.

CHARLES: Well, they will have something to say, and I’m really hoping that the big powers and the government will let the people express their own concerns, because it is one thing to have your big thing in mind, but it’s another thing when the people on the ground are asking. And as you said earlier, Haitians, they are really, really politically engaged, from the

beginning until now, and they want to continue to express themselves and say there are projects that are ours, but there are others that we do not want, we do not need.

“I’ve heard about sweatshops. I’ve heard about transforming Haiti into a tourist area. Is that what the Haitians want or need? I would not think so, or I would question that. Sweatshops? Haitians, they need work. They can work. Haitians are not lazy. But they want to be able to have certain dignity. They don’t want the country to become just another resort, another destination for tourists to come to enjoy themselves, when the population itself does not have any say, when the population itself is still under the boots of the elite and of the foreign powers.

And now what? Debates over recovery plans and aid programs: should all the money be pooled? Do we need so many soldiers there? Should we create a jobs program for Haitians. Will there be honest assessments of what was and was not done. Good intentions are never enough!

Finally, the worst possible forecast from unnamed experts: “Haiti should be preparing for another major earthquake that could be triggered by the catastrophic one last month.”

Oh No!

*This is News Dissector Danny Schechter’s fourth weekly report tracking the Haitian aid debacle. He blogs daily on [newsdissector.com/blog](http://newsdissector.com/blog) for [mediachannel.org](http://mediachannel.org). Comments to [dissector@mediachanel.org](mailto:dissector@mediachanel.org)*

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