HAITI AT THE INTERSECTION OF THE WORLD: TAPPING THE PAST, FACING THE FUTURE

Keynote address at the 23rd Annual Conference of the

HAITIAN STUDIES ASSOCIATION

Neville Hall Lecture Theatre, UWI, Mona, Jamaica,
Friday, November 11, 2011
Opening remarks.

Let me indicate at the outset what I shall not be talking about this morning, except perhaps to make some passing comments.

I shall not be talking about Haiti being the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere.

I shall not be talking about what we have come to call “Haiti’s glorious past”. I have the greatest admiration for the exploits and achievements of Boukman and Toussaint and Dessalines and Christophe and others who fought successfully for independence, but we should in my view be focusing less on the past and much more on Haiti’s somewhat less than glorious present, and on the possibilities for its future.

I shall not be talking about elections, but I do want to give you two perspectives on the recent legislative and presidential electoral processes which the relevant workshop of this conference may wish to consider.

The first is from an article of January 5 this year by James Morrell. He writes: “Its pro-government blinders have rendered the OAS electoral observation mission ineffective in detecting gross fraud to the extent that it has forfeited credibility, not only with Haitian public opinion but even with Washington.”

The second quotation is from the OAS and CARICOM Secretariats’ websites of May 17 this year. It says that the “methodology of the (electoral mission) emphasized coordination, dialogue and problem resolution through a close interface with all the stakeholders … (T)he Mission was proactive (and) highlighted constantly the importance of respect for proper process and procedures provided by the Electoral Law for the success of the electoral process … (T)he link between the verification of the tabulation and the complaints process was proven critical in determining results that reflect the will of the people. As a consequence, the electoral institutional and procedural capacity has been made more robust.” Can you believe that those two quotations refer to the same elections?

Tempting though it may be, I shall not be talking about geo-politics or about Haiti’s internal politics either. I must however express my unease at President Michel Martelly’s decision to re-establish the Haitian army, even while I accept that it was unconstitutionally disbanded in the first place by then President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. I also ask myself if the Duvalierists are making a comeback.

I shall not be talking about NGOs or about corruption or about organised crime.

I shall not be talking about reparations or restitution to Haiti, even if I once signed a petition calling for this.

Neither shall I be talking about calls for Haiti to be made a protectorate, whether of the United Nations or of any individual country. But here also I shall give two quotations.

The first is from Frederick Douglass, the legendary African-American ex-slave. Douglass had been the US Minister Resident and Consul-General in Haiti from 1889 to 1891. In January 1893 he gave a major address on Haiti at the World’s Fair in Chicago in which he said among other things: “We talk of assuming a protectorate over Haiti. We had better not attempt it. (My emphasis) … (Haiti) would rather … burn her towns and shed her warm, red tropical blood over their ashes than to submit to the degradation of any foreign yoke, however friendly.” Perhaps some people might now understand the growing opposition within Haiti to MINUSTAH.

---

1 James Morrell – Haiti-Elections: Send this Mission packing, AlterPresse, January 5, 2011.
You may say that Douglass, black himself (a mulatto, actually, but black in America), was being race-biased. But my second quotation has legal underpinnings - it comes from the United Nations Charter. Article 78 of that document states as follows: “The trusteeship system shall not apply to territories which have become Members of the United Nations, relationship among which shall be based on respect for the principle of sovereign equality.” Haiti was not a “territory” that became a UN member; she was already an independent state and a founding member of the UN. How is a founding member of the UN to be converted into a protectorate or trust territory? The concept is absurd, and we really shouldn’t be getting worked up over it.

Even if I’ve omitted from my address the discussion areas many may consider “sexy”, there’s still a lot to talk about.

THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

First, the international community in general.

(a) Aid

We know that most of the pledges of aid to Haiti made last year following the January earthquake have not been converted into actual payments. We know of the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the 2008 Accra Agenda for Action, and we know that at the end of this month a grandly-named “High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness” will be held in South Korea.

All of that is fine, but how can you logically speak about the effectiveness of aid if there is no aid, or insufficient aid, to begin with? And with the traditional aid-providing countries facing economic trauma, what aid are we talking about, anyway?

(b) Perceptions of Haiti, including race

Aid or no aid, there are the perceptions of Haiti held by the international community. These perceptions, whether at the official level or at the level of the person in the street, are overwhelmingly negative. One perception is either pity for or condescension to “the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere.” A second is Haiti fatigue, an attitude common in the United Nations. A third is the awe, even fear, to a large extent inspired by Hollywood, of what is called “voodoo”, the so-called “black magic” of Haiti.

There is yet another perception of Haiti we like to stay away from but which we must confront. It is the issue of race. Haiti is a black country, and blacks are not universally respected, even in Africa, as I can testify from my years there. We know, for instance, what blacks in Libya are experiencing these days. We know about the recent “blackface” incident at Montreal University. And we certainly know what Barack Obama’s real problem is with many in America. (Yet Obama – and this is what disappointed blacks around the world failed to grasp – is not a black President. He is a US President who is black.)

In his Chicago speech Frederick Douglass chastised his compatriots on the matter. He said that “a deeper reason for coolness between (Haiti and the USA) is this: Haiti is black, and we have not yet forgiven Haiti for being black, or forgiven the Almighty for making her black.” I am perfectly serious when I ask if anything has changed significantly in the nearly 120 years since those words were spoken.

The International Year for People of African Descent has come and nearly gone, virtually unnoticed, as has the 10th anniversary of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action which emerged from the 2001 World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance. Did anyone this year, and black people in particular, try consistently to highlight the rôle and example of the world’s first black republic?
(c) Culture

The international community seeks with embarrassment to evade the subject of race, but there is another subject that it generally doesn’t even think about. That subject is national culture. By “culture” I don’t mean song and dance. I mean what Frantz Fanon in The Wretched of the Earth calls “the whole body of efforts made by a people in the sphere of thought to describe, justify and praise the action through which that people has created itself and keeps itself in existence.”

In his unpublished book Culture and Governance: a Cultural Approach to Sustainable Democracy, Mervyn Claxton writes that “(a) central component of any culture is its ideas concerning power, which, with its attitudes to authority and its conception of political legitimacy, differ between societies having divergent cultural values and traditions.” He goes on: “The real problem involved in (the movement of political ideas and concepts across cultural frontiers) is that of successfully transferring the values they actually embody.”

And the Commission for Africa, which was chaired by former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, defined culture in its 2005 report as being “about shared patterns of identity, symbolic meaning, aspiration…the relationships between individuals and groups within that society (and) about the relationships between ideas and perspectives…self-respect and a sense of security, about how individuals are socialised and values are formed and transmitted.”

The international community, dominated by Western philosophy and attitudes, has no time for such subtleties, whether in Haiti or anywhere else. Rather, it is a case of one size being tailored and trumpeted to fit all: Sierra Leone is Afghanistan is East Timor is Iraq is South Sudan is Haiti. And now Libya, too, I suppose. The identical themes, orchestrated identically, recur: democracy, institution-building, marketplace magic, liberalised foreign investment, and so on. Particular emphasis is placed on what are called “free and fair elections”, of which I assume what took place in Haiti within this past year are an excellent example.

(d) MINUSTAH

But if many in the international community are suffering from Haiti fatigue, we know that many in Haiti are weary of the international community, especially the presence of MINUSTAH. Too many foreign friends, Ericq Pierre wrote in early January this year, “came with too many propositions, too many resources, and too many promises. They make too many decisions.” And then he used a striking phrase: “They came with too much knowledge and not enough know-how.” The cultural gap remains as wide as it is deep.

Much displeasure has focused on MINUSTAH. Its approach is perceived as insensitive, interfering, colonialist and over-militarised. It is viewed as an interloper guzzling money that could go towards socio-economic development. Its members are seen as beach- and bar-loving, and as only too willing to exploit misery for sex. Add to that the recent incident of alleged sexual assault involving Uruguayan elements, called “peacekeepers”, and the continuing deadly effects of the pathogenic cholera strain introduced into the country from South Asia – that is to say, almost certainly by so-called “peacekeepers” from Nepal – add all that, and the ingredients of a volatile cocktail are ready. Incidentally, should the UN not pay reparations or compensation to Haiti for further damaging the country’s health with a disease likely to become endemic there?

Not surprisingly, public calls for MINUSTAH’s departure were supported by a similar request to the UN Secretary-General. President Martelly however opposed this, saying there was no “effective national alternative.” So MINUSTAH’s mandate has now been renewed for another year up to October 15, 2012.
But what rôle should MINUSTAH be playing in Haiti, if the Mission is really to be of sustained benefit to the Haitian people? In late December last year the OAS Representative in Haiti, Ricardo Seitenfus of Brazil, was dismissed from his post, apparently because he had dared to say publicly that Haiti was not an international threat but a country whose problems were primarily socio-economic. In April of this year the Cuban Foreign Minister said much the same thing to the UN Security Council: “Haiti does not need an occupation army,” he said. “(It) needs resources for rebuilding and … for development. It needs humanitarian commitment and not interference or political manipulation.”

I don’t like to play the game of “I told you so”, but I must quote for you a passage from my final report of September 2004, seven years ago, to then UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan. I said: “(The) focus of MINUSTAH should be on assisting Haiti’s development...I continue to be firmly of the view that the concept of MINUSTAH as it now exists is unsound, and largely irrelevant to the people of Haiti, whose welfare has to be of paramount importance. The civilian side of MINUSTAH must, if it is to be at all valid, overwhelmingly comprise developmental aspects (which) would supplement, not replace, the work of agencies and indigenous organizations already operating in Haiti...”

“The military/police side of MINUSTAH ... should not merely confine (itself) to (its) traditional functions but also become involved in community projects ... Ideally, (such an approach) should be part of the mandate given by the Security Council.”

That is why, throughout my contract period with the UN and after, I kept stressing the need for peace-building as distinct from peacekeeping. Subsequently, Annan accepted a recommendation from his High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change for the establishment of a Peacebuilding Commission, and in December 2005 the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution to that effect. It had taken the United Nations 60 years since its birth to recognise that the enduring foundations of peace do not spring from the barrel of a peacekeeper’s gun. Has the Commission been of benefit to Haiti? I hope I can hear from Haitians on this.

(e) IHRC

Another focus of great displeasure is the Interim Haiti Recovery Commission (IHRC). I have no doubt that this gathering is already familiar with the criticisms made of the IHRC, and so I shall not repeat them, except for one, which I find truly frightening.

There was much fanfare at, and following, the New York meeting on Haiti, said to be a donors’ meeting, at the end of March last year. Nearly US$10b. in assistance were pledged, which the meeting solemnly promised would “support (the government’s) vision and Action Plan (and) be delivered in a manner that strengthens the authority of the State …” Haiti was to be “built back better” – you remember the phrase? And Dominique Strauss-Kahn, then Managing Director of the IMF, stressed the need for Haitian authorities “to be in the driver’s seat.”

There is a view that anything Strauss-Kahn says, at least on certain matters, should be taken with a pinch of salt. That may well be so, but it seems that on this occasion the example of Lot’s wife, who in the Bible story was turned into a pillar of salt, might be more appropriate. For if there is one seat the Haitian authorities are not to be found in, it is the driver’s.

That is bad enough, but what former Jamaican Prime Minister, P.J. Patterson, the CARICOM representative on the IHRC, and others have been saying is that the projects approved by the IHRC have

---

2 Bruno Rodríguez, Cuban Foreign Minister – Declaration on Haiti to the UN Security Council, April 6, 2011.
not been reflecting the critical priorities of the Haitian government. There has been great unhappiness with procedure, but alarm over content is far more worrying.

That is what I meant when I spoke a few moments ago about being frightened, but I am even more frightened by the fact that US Government Accountability Office agrees. In its report of May this year it notes that “funding for approved projects is uneven across sectors and not necessarily aligned with Haitian priorities.” (My emphasis). Yet the IHRC website tells us innocently that the IHRC “aims to ensure that the planning and implementation of the recovery efforts are Haitian-led … and (to) communicate clear outputs desired by the Haitian Government and community.” (My emphasis). One may be forgiven for asking: what exactly are the Haitian government and community? Well, there is a new government now, even if the community remains the same. We shall see what happens.

(f) USA

I should say something about the USA, which is the most powerful foreign influence on Haiti.

We are grateful to Wikileaks for letting the world know what US Ambassador Janet Sanderson thought of then President René Prévàl. According to her, it was necessary to “manag(e)” him – I don’t even want to think about what she meant by that – and she pointed out that although Prévàl had briefly lived in the USA, he did not “truly understand Americans or the Washington policy environment …”. I couldn’t help wondering how long the Ambassador had lived in Haiti, and to what extent, if at all, she understood Haitians and the Port-au-Prince policy environment. And bear in mind that foreign policy is formulated in capitals largely on the basis of reports from their foreign Missions. So Washington actively discourages Aristide’s return, while making only perfunctory noises about Duvalier’s. It does make you think, especially about the nature of what is often described as “democracy”. Not to mention Ambassador Sanderson’s reports to her capital.

However, this is not to suggest that the USA has not taken positive action regarding Haiti. Following the earthquake there was an explosion of Congressional legislation favouring the country. Seventy-two members of the House of Representatives urged the World Bank first to cancel Haiti’s debt service payments and then all its debts. A Special Coordinator to oversee US reconstruction plans was named. Temporary Protected Status has been extended until January 2013. An investment programme called the Leverage Effective Application of Direct Investments, or LEAD, has been devised; it is to be a public sector - private sector partnership, or P3.

The picture of actual disbursements of promised aid is much less bright, and vague statements by high US government officials only make that picture more murky. In January, at a State Department briefing, Cheryl Mills, Counselor to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, said this: “And yet, Haiti has always captivated – certainly in our country – the imagination and also the community and the natural relations that are built through the diaspora of how to think about the connections that would be necessary to actively help Haiti be the Haiti it seeks for its future.” Perhaps, ladies and gentlemen, you could help me understand what Ms. Mills was trying to say.

For his part, Rajiv Shah, the USAID Administrator, speaking at the same briefing, gave two examples of what he called “capturing the opportunities of the moment to build back better.” One of the examples was “investing … in efforts to bring mobile banking and mobile financial transactions to the people of Haiti.” I would not have thought that mobile banking and mobile financial transactions were among the pressing needs of the average displaced and jobless Haitian, and I expect that is the kind of thing the US Government Accountability Office was talking about.

THE CARIBBEAN
The theme of this conference is “Haiti at the intersection of the Caribbean: tracing the past, mapping the future.” But which Caribbean do we have in mind? Haiti’s immediate neighbour, with which relations have always been uneven, and which may not resist the temptation to use the recent Haitian dual citizenship provision in creative ways? The Bahamas and Jamaica, whose ambivalences are no secret? Cuba, whose public health assistance to Haiti over the years has been, and continues to be, invaluable? Venezuela, whose President, Hugo Chávez, has repeatedly acknowledged the inspiration and help his country’s founder, Simón Bolívar, received from Haiti? Some small islands which see themselves as more comfortable in the embrace of the metropolis than in productive discourse with their fellow islands? Guyana and Suriname, both called Caribbean, but neither of whose shores is washed by a single wave of the Caribbean Sea? Anglophone West Indian-origin communities in Panama and coastal Central America? The North American and European diaspora? These are matters for your workshops, and beyond. I shall confine myself to a few remarks on Haiti and CARICOM.

That the Haitian revolution had a profound impact on the Anglophone Caribbean is indisputable. As early as 1802 there was an uprising in my own small island of Tobago, and there were revolts also in Barbados, in Demerara (now part of Guyana), and of course here in Jamaica. But there has not been any sustained Haitian influence in the region; the colonial powers – still colonial, still powers – and our own sloth have seen to that.

C.L.R. James, a Caribbean man from Trinidad and Tobago, wrote in *The Black Jacobins* that “Toussaint L’Ouverture and the Haitian slaves brought into the world more than the abolition of slavery.” And the Baron de Vastey, a confidant of Henri Christophe’s, noted that “the revolution did not transfer from the whites to the blacks the question of control of the West Indies… (It) will contribute to the happiness of the human race because of its moral and political consequences.” Alas, momentum in our following that lead, and finding a different path, an independent path, to the region’s development has flagged virtually to the point of stasis.

We seem now to have persuaded ourselves that a flag and an anthem and what Sir Shridath Ramphal describes as “local control”, that is, the “maximum leader” domestic syndrome, are all that is needed. Independence is no longer a matter of the mind and the spirit; it is now a matter of visible and superficial externalities and of a marked decline in self-confidence and in regional effort and identity. It is true that the private sectors of Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago have started to work together, but only very recently. It is also true, however, that the vast majority of us in the Anglophone Caribbean still scandalously cling to the colonial arrangement of the British Privy Council instead of widening and strengthening our own Caribbean Court of Justice.

The Prime Minister of Dominica, Mr Roosevelt Skerrit, gave a blunt assessment of CARICOM last month in Barbados. He said: “To be quite frank, for the most part (CARICOM) exists in the words of the Treaty only, rather than a tangible entity that is seen by its people as a vital part of their lives. The forces

---


of historical necessity which might otherwise have driven the people together naturally are weak or non-existent.\textsuperscript{5}

For instance, compare our inaction, even abdication, on what are called the Economic Partnership Agreements that the European Union, in its own best interests, has easily persuaded us to accept – compare that with the sentiments expressed at the very first Pan-African Conference held in London in 1900.

The guiding spirit behind that meeting was another Caribbean man from Trinidad and Tobago, Henry Sylvester Williams, and one of the participants was a representative of Menelik II, Emperor of what was then known as Abyssinia. But this representative was not from Abyssinia. He was a Caribbean person, a man from Haiti named Bénito Sylvain.

Connected to two countries that had fought either to gain or retain their independence of foreign control, Sylvain foresaw a time when, as Owen Mathurin tells us, “the rights of the indigenous peoples would have to be recognized by every colonial power.”\textsuperscript{6} He and other participants in the conference were emphasising race, of course, and close links between Africans and people of African descent, but they were not confining themselves to that issue. With Sylvain in the vanguard of policy and protest, they were in fact adopting an overall \textit{anti-colonial} agenda.

One hundred and eleven years later, race is still a major issue, though the fields of political and socio-economic engagement have broadened and diversified. I regret to say that the contemporary Caribbean, including Haiti, does not give me the impression that it has understood that, or, if it \textit{has} understood, has prepared and is preparing itself for new and evolving scenarios. The energy and vision of 1804 and 1900 have been degenerating into what, if we are not careful, could become a new and more insidious age of colonialism. That is certainly \textit{not} the lesson we should have learned from the Haitian revolution.

The psychological link with Africa is now greatly attenuated; the contemporary Caribbean is not the Caribbean of Sylvain and Marcus Garvey. But the link still remains. Rastafarianism has been judicially recognised as a religion. “Assefa” is an Amhara name from the Ethiopian highlands; I don’t know if the great sprinter knows that. And the indestructible Dudley Thompson, a Caribbean man from Jamaica who was a member of the late Jomo Kenyatta’s legal defence team, has recently become the first person to be made a citizen of Africa and to be promised a passport from the African Union. All of that is good, but where is the continuous constructive relationship with that continent, and indeed with other parts of the developing world, in areas of socio-economic development?

Where Haiti is concerned, CARICOM, of which it has been a member for more than nine years now, has not done as much as it should. This is a deficiency of which the new Haitian Prime Minister, M. Garry Conille, made mention in his recent general policy statement to the Haitian Parliament, even as he stressed his country’s special relationship with CARICOM. I agree with the Prime Minister. Both governments and civil society have fallen short, the governments in particular. They have tended to

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{5} Roosevelt Skerrit – David Thompson Memorial Lecture, UWI, Cave Hill, Barbados, October 27, 2011.
\end{itemize}
emphasise rhetoric over coherent action. It is a failing of Caribbean politicians, one which has been readily exploited by others. We constantly call on these same others to assist us without paying sufficient, or any, attention to what strengths of ours we could deploy – indeed, we often do not even recognise that we have strengths.

I accept that CARICOM governments are not able to provide many of the resources, financial and other, that Haiti needs. I accept also that they have not been totally inactive regarding Haiti, and I commend them on granting Haiti, with effect from January 1 this year, a three-year period of non-reciprocal trade in over 40 items. The first shipment under the agreement was made to Grenada in April.

But while I applaud former Prime Minister Patterson’s ongoing heroics, and while I witnessed at first hand the emotion and genuine anger in 2004 over the forced departure of Aristide from Haiti, I also know of the massive simultaneous contradictions and inconsistencies in the CARICOM governments’ behaviour on that very subject.

And I have not heard of concerted CARICOM lobbying efforts on Haiti’s behalf with the donor agencies and administrations, even though one of the foundations of the revised Treaty of Chaguaramas is the enhanced coordination of foreign and foreign economic policies.

I have heard nothing about representation, even consular representation, of Haiti in capitals where it does not have a Mission and where others have Missions. For instance, there is a substantial Haitian community in the United Kingdom, but no Haitian Mission. Could CARICOM not help, until the appointment of at least an Honorary Consul of Haiti? I have heard nothing about establishing proper air and sea transport arrangements with Haiti – though I must admit that that shortfall has been afflicting the rest of CARICOM as well for the last several decades.

Civil society has been more forthcoming, even though its interest has by and large not been sustained. As a CARICOM citizen, I remember with pride the tremendous and spontaneous outpouring of support after January 12 last year from ordinary persons up and down the region, in terms of money, items, visits to Haiti by medical teams, etc. I shall say more about this tomorrow evening, and about the efforts of the Medianet Haiti Relief Fund, which I chair.

Letters were written to the World Bank requesting cancellation of Haiti’s debt. I wrote one myself, as did the late John Maxwell, another Caribbean man from Jamaica, who for years was a tireless, dedicated, eloquent spokesman for, and promoter of, the cause of the Haitian people, and who deserves our highest praise and respect.

But the earthquake is no longer news; we have “moved on”. Haitian distress is now met with a shrug of the shoulders. Haiti fatigue is spreading again.

A Caribbean Construction Forum was formed, with the aim, as I understand it, of building houses in Haiti. I have heard nothing about it recently. A CARICOM-Haiti Fund for investment was announced; it has remained at the level of announcement. All I have been able to hear from my own country, Trinidad and Tobago, for instance, is about an agreement between the WIN Group of Haiti and the Trinidad Cement Ltd. (TCL) Group for the establishment and operation of a cement terminal in Port-au-Prince. The cement is imported from the TCL’s factory in Jamaica, the Caribbean Cement Company Ltd. (CCCL). This is not investment as I understand the concept, and I shall keep trying.

At least the University of the West Indies has been pursuing the issue of education; Matthew Smith and others have been tireless in their efforts. There will be a roundtable discussion of this later today, and I shall not therefore say any more on the matter now.

HAITI
(i) **Some general considerations**

I come now to Haiti itself. Although your Association was kind enough to ask me to give this keynote address, and although you will, to my great surprise and delight, be presenting me tomorrow evening with this year’s Award for Service, I would not dream of representing myself as an expert on Haiti. I will therefore not be so foolish as to bore you with prescriptions, with which you are far more familiar than I, of what Haiti needs or doesn’t need. In any case, that is for Haitians to decide. I shall however raise one or two general considerations.

Let’s try to leave aside for the moment the politics of party and personality and the finger-pointing, of which there is far too much, and try to focus on the societal essence of Haiti. I’ve already spoken about culture in the broad sense, but my first consideration is: what is the nature of that culture?

In January of this year, Yves Savain wrote that “(a) revolt of young Haitian intellectuals 65 years ago inadvertently opened the door for a black nationalistic ideology that continues to dominate – and hold back – Haiti.” His own father, Roger, was one of those intellectuals.

He states further that “(a)n important reason that Haiti remains poor is the stranglehold of a pernicious ethnic provincialism that now permeates all sectors of society. It is a mentality allergic to talent and merit and, today especially, fearful of the vast, wealthy and well-educated Haitian diaspora.”

He ends by saying that “Haiti, entrenched in a parochial and paranoid cult of color and familial alliances, is poorer than ever.”

Is what Savain says accurate? Is noirisme (which I deliberately translate as “blackism”, not “black nationalism”) the overriding culture and philosophy of today’s Haiti? If so, what are the implications for the country’s development, not only where internal socio-economic relations are concerned, but also externally, with particular reference to the diaspora on which the country so heavily depends? Why should home-grown noiristes be afraid of a diaspora that is itself largely black? And how does noirisme fit with the universal sentiments of Toussaint, who said that “(i)t is not a circumstantial liberty conceded to us that we wish, but the unequivocal adoption of the principle that no man, whether he be born red, black or white, can become the property of his fellow men”? What may have happened between then and now?

A second consideration is religion. I spoke earlier of the less than flattering reputation outside Haiti that the vodou has. But more than that is Christian right-wing horror at what are seen as the evils of the vodou and the continuing curse of the “pact” that Haitian freedom fighters are said to have made with the Devil in the late 18th century. For these so-called Christians, whether Pat Robertson or black, last year’s earthquake was punishment by a just God for Haiti’s grievous misdeeds. The hundreds of thousands who died deserved to die. “Haiti,” said a black evangelical compatriot of mine, “is one of the nations dedicated to Satan…They are cursed. That is common knowledge.” Such uplifting, empathetic sentiments, ladies and gentlemen. And all in the name of God. Poor God.

---


8 Daut – *op. cit.*
Worse, a connection is often made between adherence to that religion and Haiti’s flagging socioeconomic progress. Should we therefore expect a concerted assault on Haiti from North American pulpiteers and their Caribbean minions in an effort to eliminate the vodou, a central element of Haiti’s culture, and direct Haiti into what might be called “proper Christian paths”? Which would of course have the dual benefit of leading directly not only to salvation but also, and perhaps more important, to the prosperity that has for so long eluded Haiti. Tea Party activists will know more about this than I.

A third consideration is what Camille Chalmers, Executive Director of PAPDA (Haitian Platform for Alternative Development), sees as the role and responsibility of the intellectual. It is, he says, “to listen, to help to recode, to give visibility to the popular creativeness, to connect with the world and to counter the negative images of Haiti that are being projected.” As a non-intellectual myself, may I ask if Chalmers’ perspective suggests an unconscious disconnection between élite and the masses?

A fourth consideration is the social revolution that a meeting of Haitian organisations called for last March 26 in Port-au-Prince. They wanted a “break with the exclusion … in the relationship between the rural and urban sectors … between men and women, and in the refusal to build accessible and universal social services.”

They wanted a “break with the dependence … expressed through an almost total submission of much of the political class to the great powers …”

They wanted a “break with the hyper-concentrated … anti-peasantry and anti-national growth model …. We need to build a development model based on agriculture and agro-industry geared to the priority needs of the domestic market (and) an economic model which breaks with the logic of speculation …”

They wanted a “break with the prevailing relationship between State and Nation and property relations …”

And they wanted a “break with the colonial reading of (Haiti) …”9

Are those concerns and perceptions and considerations valid? To what extent, if at all, do they reflect the sentiments of the average Haitian? Which brings us to a fifth consideration.

To what extent is the average Haitian consulted about his or her country? Has there ever been a genuine national opinion poll in Haiti on any matter? To what extent does participatory democracy exist? If the Haitians on the IHRC are being ignored, what is left for the man and woman in the Haitian street?

The issue of leadership non-consultation of the population isn’t new, of course, and certainly not peculiar to Haiti: once in office, governments and private sector moguls come quickly to the conviction that omniscience has descended on them, I assume from God (though God would be well advised not to take too much credit), and that their opinions, and the opinions of those who agree with them, are the only ones that count – in other words, what Sonny Ramphal calls the obsession with “local control”.

9 Declaration by Haitian Social Organizations, March 31, 2011.
My own disappointment with this gulf between “leaders” and “led” is why I have been encouraged by the recent meetings between President Martelly and several of his predecessors in office. They may not agree on many things, but at least the emphasis on “local control” seems to have been set aside, however temporarily. That could be beneficial to Haiti, which has seen too much confrontation over the centuries.

I am also happy to note the decision by eight governments, as announced by President Obama in September, to establish an Open Government Partnership.10 The governments have pledged to be more transparent, to implement the highest standards of integrity, to increase access to technology and to engage more of their citizens in decision-making. That last one is crucial. They have also undertaken to work with civil society groups to develop an action plan of specific commitments, and a Steering Committee will be meeting next month in Brazil to try to move the initiative forward. I strongly urge Haiti, and indeed other Caribbean countries, to get involved.

CARICOM, for one, ought to view this approach favourably. It was only a few months ago that its outgoing Chairman, Prime Minister Tillman Thomas of Grenada, formally proposed that the organisation “consider mandating the establishment of a Permanent Forum of Non-State Actors …” We have to be grateful for whatever mercies come our way, ladies and gentlemen. CARICOM was born in 1973, but it is only in 2011, nearly 40 years later, that a proposal like this can be made. And note the tentative language in which it is couched.

Another interesting idea on consultation comes from Denmark, where a daily newspaper has launched a think tank, the results of which will be given to the new Prime Minister after she has completed 100 days in office.11 What is attractive about this think tank is that it is open to everyone, and could therefore provide a better understanding than would normally be the case of the sentiments of the Danish people as a whole.

(ii) Some pressing social issues

Side by side with these broad issues of policy and philosophy, however, are more urgent day-to-day problems which afflict the Haitian state and people. Housing, especially since the earthquake, is an obvious one, linked closely with policies – or the lack thereof – on land ownership and use. It is a matter of much regret for all of us, I believe, that so little has been done in these areas in the nearly two years since January 12, 2010. Those of you who have not seen it should make an effort to read the Declaration on the Right to Housing that emerged from the international forum on housing held in Port-au-Prince last May. In this context, greater use should be made of the services provided by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization in land management, land planning and land use. All of these could, among other things, help repair the shattered base of Haiti’s agriculture, help generate employment and help provide the societal equity that is now invisible.

---

10 The eight governments are Brazil, Indonesia, Mexico, Norway, Philippines, South Africa, United Kingdom and USA.

11 The Prime Minister is Halle Thorning-Schmidt, elected September 15, 2011.
I shall say nothing about good governance and institution-building, except to note that these are concepts that must, if they are to be valid, take into account the traditions and customary laws of Haiti - in other words, the *culture* of Haiti. One size, I stress, does *not* fit all, and the attempt merely to superimpose imported practices and procedures on the Haitian polity, however well-meaning the attempt, is unlikely to bring the success hoped for.

I shall however say a bit about education, which to my mind is, with health, the bedrock of any country’s development. Especially these days and into the foreseeable future, knowledge, including innovation, is of primordial importance.

First Wiki Leaks, now Sweet Micky speaks, and he has put major emphasis on education. He’s not only speaking, he’s going to sing next month to raise funds for education. Former President Aristide has also been burnishing his education credentials: more schools, he has said, were built between 1994 and 2004 than between 1804 and 1994. If true, that is a frightening statistic. As for former President Duvalier, I would be surprised to hear that he has any plans at all for this sector.

The Haitian Constitution says that education is the responsibility of the State and its territorial divisions, which must make schooling available to all, free of charge. Despite these fine sentiments, has the country ever had a universal education system? Or a fee-free one?

And education in what and for what? Will Prime Minister Conille’s policies and projects be informed by prior extensive consultation and research?

A few months ago there was an absorbing article in the *New York Times* by Neal Gabler. He said that “in the past we collected information not simply to know things … (but also) … to convert it into something larger than facts and ultimately more useful – into ideas that make sense of the information. We sought not just to apprehend the world but to comprehend it, which is the primary function of ideas.” These days, however, we are so inundated with information we have little time to process it. We must therefore prioritise. But first we must think.

None of us here, I’m sure, believes that the economy of Haiti can be based on free zones and on sewing t-shirts and underwear for the North American market. I note that the South Korean firm that is scheduled to open an industrial park in Northern Haiti next year says that it will create Haiti’s first textile mill and be the country’s first manufacturer of clothing made from indigenous material. (What might this “indigenous material” be, by the way? What research has been done on it?) I note also that the firm says it will create 20,000 jobs in the first phase of its operations.

But we have heard similar noises before. Further, we must be careful lest the wages and working conditions at the park fall below ILO standards of “decent work”. Profit is desirable, but the people’s welfare is much more important.

(iii) Some ideas

Even if all were well, however, the economy could still not be viably based on this type of activity. Ideas are needed.

*One idea* might be the international branding of certain Haitian products. Blue Mountain coffee of Jamaica is an international brand. So is champagne of France. So is Basmati rice of India. So is Barbancourt rum of Haiti. But Haiti isn’t only Barbancourt rum. Outstandingly, she has a long and brilliant artistic tradition, one which Martha Stewart appears to have recently discovered. Could Haitian art, especially painting, not be marketed as a brand?
What about Haitian music? Jamaica’s reggae is known worldwide. Is it not possible for Haiti’s *kompa* to achieve the same level? And if there is going to be a textile mill, could not a uniquely Haitian product, with Haitian designers and manufacturers, emerge? In other words, could not the creativity of the Haitian people be channelled into new streams of development? And so allow the building and strengthening of new intellectual property and assets?

*Another idea* is new sources of energy. Venezuela’s PetroCaribe has been of great assistance to Haiti, and Hugo Chávez has generously written off the country’s debt to Venezuela. But imported oil is still a drain on the country’s meagre financial resources, and there are types of indigenous energy which Haiti could explore. We hear a great deal about solar and wind energy. The latter is somewhat expensive, I’m told, but Barbados, which has considerable experience of solar energy, could be a helpful partner to Haiti in this regard. And what of geothermal energy?

What too of ocean current energy? This is not a new technology; it has been around for nearly 50 years, and it is attracting more and more attention, even in the USA. In September, for instance, legislation called the Marine and Hydrokinetic Renewable Energy Promotion Act was introduced in the US Congress. If a country as perpetually wasteful of its resources as the USA is now prepared to consider renewable energy as a serious option, we should sit up and take notice. The legislation aims to assist those “working to develop and deploy ocean-generated energy for America’s consumers.” This form of energy also has the great advantages of being both inexhaustible and environmentally friendly. And Haiti’s environment needs all the help it can get, especially in this era of climate change.

I am told that the currents in the Canal de la Tortue, the body of water between Haiti’s north coast and the Ile de la Tortue, present significant potential for electricity generation. This area is very close to South Korea’s proposed North Industrial Park near Cap-Haïtien, and since South Korea itself is already in the current power business, perhaps fruitful discussions could be held on the subject.

I should note as well that Prime Minister Thomas of Grenada has proposed a CARICOM regional renewable energy production programme and a regional investment programme to sustain it. Prime Minister Conille is also concerned about energy, and it would be a step in the right direction if CARICOM could initiate an early dialogue on the subject.

*Another idea* is the possible exploitation of certain natural resources. But what are these natural resources? The CIA World Factbook lists them at July this year as bauxite, copper, calcium carbonate, gold, marble and hydropower. (Wikipedia says calcium carbonate is a common substance found in rocks, is an active ingredient in agricultural lime, and is widely used medicinally as a calcium supplement or antacid). But is that all Haiti has? And where and in what estimated quantities do its resources exist? Satellite imagery can help, and it is clear to me from photographs I have seen that the developed world – Canada, for instance – has extremely detailed information on pre- and post-earthquake Haiti. The Canadian Space Agency says on its website that the radar signal of its RADARSAT-2 satellite “is sensitive to terrain features, fine-scale surface roughness, and dielectric properties and orientation of materials, e.g. moisture content, buildings.”

The tool employed by the satellites is remote sensing, a technology to which I was introduced nearly 35 years ago in India – and it was already in use then. Wikipedia describes it as “the acquisition of
information about an object or phenomenon, without making physical contact with the object. In modern usage, the term generally refers to the use of aerial sensor technologies to detect and classify objects on earth (both on the surface and in the atmosphere, and oceans) by means of propagated signals …” Like electromagnetic radiation emitted from satellites, which can give an excellent picture, not only of what lies on earth’s surface, but also below it.

So is the CIA information all there is? Or are there other resources as well? What will Haiti be doing about it?

A fourth idea has to do with Haiti’s country partners. Traditionally, these have been the USA, Canada and France. It is surely time for Haiti, and indeed the rest of CARICOM, to establish new links of trade, technical assistance, investment, etc. The BRICS countries – Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa – spring to mind. In one case, that of China, there will have to be altered diplomatic arrangements, since Haiti now recognises an entity called Taiwan, which claims to be China, but which is not.

And what about civil society partners from the Caribbean region? Language is a difficulty, and culture too, I admit, but these are not insuperable. Could a Caribbean Volunteer Service Corps not be envisaged? Coordination of activity is vital in this respect, but again this is not an insuperable hurdle to vault.

A fifth idea comes from Professor Robert Maguire, who is one of today’s panellists. It is the freeing-up of what he calls “dead capital”. I leave it to him to explain his proposal. I will only say now, in addition to the proposal, that there is a study which suggests that Haiti’s agricultural production and Gross Domestic Product may well be considerably underestimated. The same consideration probably applies to the contribution of Haitian women to the country’s gross domestic product.

(iv) The Haitian diaspora

In all the suggestions I have just made, a key player will be, must be, the Haitian diaspora.

The massive financial contribution of the diaspora to Haiti is well known. The Inter-American Development Bank estimates that in 2010 remittances to Haiti reached USD1.971 billion. As might be expected, there was a very sharp rise in the period January to March. For the entire year, the figure represented over 30 per cent of Haiti’s GDP. In the hemisphere, that percentage was exceeded only in the case of Guyana. We should also remember that spending within Haiti by diaspora visitors is very significant and must greatly exceed traditional tourist spending, especially these days. Four points should however be noted.

First, given the economic difficulties now afflicting, and likely to continue to afflict, the developed world from which the remittances largely come, the level of such remittances and other spending will probably decline.

Second, inflation in recipient countries, including Haiti, has risen, meaning that purchasing power has dropped. There could therefore be a double whammy.

Third, as the Haitian Diaspora Federation rightly points out, remittances go to individuals and specific groups, and are not directed at overall national development.

Fourth, if by “diaspora” we essentially mean those who were born and raised in Haiti, then emigrated, what of their children and grandchildren born and raised outside Haiti? Do they have the same attachment to Haiti, and would they be willing to send remittances at the same levels, or at all, to a country they may never have visited?
We should not become starry-eyed about the rôle and function of the diaspora; it is a matter that has to be handled very carefully. There are often tensions between those who have returned to their countries of birth after spending many years abroad and those who have never left, and I’m speaking generally, not only about Haiti. The returnee is often frustrated by what he or she sees as continuing backwardness and the difficulty in getting simple things done; the person who has stayed behind is irritated by what he or she sees as the returnee’s condescending attitude. Friction arises.

The issue of limited dual citizenship is one facet of the caution displayed towards the diaspora by those who have never left. I recognise that many in the Haitian diaspora who have acquired other citizenships are offended by a constitutional amendment that debars them from being considered for high office, but I ask them to try to put themselves in the shoes of the others. In this connection, I should tell them that precisely the same constraint applies in my own country – indeed, a Minister of the current administration had to renounce his US citizenship before he could face the polls.

In this connection, too, may I with the greatest respect suggest to the diaspora that it exercise care in its public statements. On its website, the Haitian Diaspora Federation says that those who have called for a “reverse brain drain” agree “that this will require measurable improvement in peace and justice, land and property laws, trade processes, cessation of human rights abuse and corruption, better-educated workforce, professional civil service, and overall spirit of competitiveness in the world.”

Ladies and gentlemen, if a reverse brain drain requires all that, is therefore dependent on all that, what you are saying in essence is that there will never be a reverse brain drain, because the diaspora wishes to return only to a previously sanitised Haiti. But sanitised how? By whom? By those who never left and who are deemed to be an integral part of the problem? Are they being asked to prepare the ground for returnees, who will then come in and enjoy benefits for which they did not work? Do you see what I mean by perceived condescension? Surely it is for the diaspora to work with those who have never left in order to help achieve a better Haiti?

I make no comment on President Martelly’s proposal to tax remittances and telephone calls, except to say that, especially if you are a Head of State or Government, it is always best to reflect on the implications of what you might want to say before placing yourself on the record.

There are two areas I suggest the diaspora explore in its efforts to be of assistance.

One refers to what I mentioned a few minutes ago – the link of the younger generation to Haiti. The Jamaican conglomerate, GraceKennedy, introduced eight years ago what it calls the GraceKennedy Jamaican Birthright Programme, which is for second and third-generation diaspora members “to claim their Jamaican heritage.” According to GraceKennedy, the programme “is a cultural and professional internship geared at highlighting all aspects of Jamaican life while furthering the career goals of the selected candidates.” While you are in Jamaica you may wish to have discussions with the company on the subject.

The second area is the United Nations Development Programme scheme called TOKTEN, or “Transfer of Knowledge through Expatriate Nationals”. (Perhaps the word “Know-how” should have been used instead of “Knowledge”, but let that pass). At one stage the scheme seems to have fallen into disuse, but it has been revived, and in Haiti is now operating out of the UNDP office in Port-au-Prince. The UNDP website describes the scheme as “a window of opportunity for expatriate nationals with lengthy
experiences in their fields of specialization to return to their home countries for an agreed period of time.” The scheme is now being used in more than 30 countries worldwide. And, of course, it cuts across generations.

CONCLUSION

Ladies and gentlemen, I have tried in these remarks to de-emphasise the issues in and of Haiti that normally engage our attention and instead to seek a different focus, a different perspective, on that country. Many of us tend to view Haiti with emotion. Emotion is unavoidable, but dispassionate and calm examination and analysis are indispensable for development – of Haiti or any other country.

I have no solutions to offer, only proposals and questions, though I hope that at least some of what I said this morning is useful. But I must end now. I don’t want to be accused of practising a run for political office by elevating rhetoric – I dare not say “eloquence” – over coherence.

Thank you.

November 11, 2011

Reginald Dumas