

## Extra Feature Story

### **Island Nation of Haiti Reels After Earthquake Causes 'Enormous' Damage**

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**Tons of food, water and fuel have arrived in the Haiti after the 7.0-magnitude earthquake devastated the capital, Port-au-Prince on Tuesday but the situation continues to look dire.**

Survivors of the earthquake continue to search through toppled homes, schools and buildings, looking for family and friends, while International Aid workers help survivors to scramble for basic needs such as electricity, food and water.

Because Haiti has struggled for decades with political instability and natural disasters, 60 percent of buildings were shoddily built and unsafe in normal circumstances, according to the mayor of Port-au-Prince, the capital. The death toll is still unclear but the International Red Cross estimates 45,000-50,000 deaths.

The quake measured 7.0-magnitude on the Richter scale, which means it is considered a "major" quake that can cause serious damage over larger areas. Haiti has had earthquakes before and sits on a large geological fault, but this one was described as one of the most powerful to hit the region.

"Parliament has collapsed," the Haitian president, René Préval, told the Miami Herald newspaper.

"The tax office has collapsed. Schools have collapsed. Hospitals have collapsed. There are a lot of schools that have a lot of dead people in them."

#### **Americans mobilize to help**

After President Obama finally spoke with the Haitian president, the White House released a statement saying "President Obama said that the world has been devastated by the loss and suffering in Haiti, and pledged the full support of the American people for the government and people of Haiti as it relates to both the immediate recovery effort, and the long-term rebuilding effort."

Haiti native and musician Wyclef Jean released a statement saying: "I cannot stress enough what a human disaster this is, and idle hands will only make this tragedy worse. The over 2 million people in Port-au-Prince tonight face catastrophe alone. We must act now."

He urged people to use their cell phones to text "Yele" to 501501, which will automatically donate \$5 to the Yele Haiti Earthquake Fund (it will be charged to your cell phone bill). In less than a week Yele Haiti, has raised over \$1 million from the mobile donations alone for the victims of the devastating earthquake.

#### **Man-made problems combined with natural disasters**

The nation of Haiti was created in 1804, after the world's first successful slave rebellion led by Jean-Jacques Dessalines against France.

But infighting and power struggles sent the country into a paralyzing disorder. U.S. Marines occupied Haiti from 1915 to 1934. In 1937, some 18,000 Haitians were massacred along the Dominican border on the orders of Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo.

In 1957, Francois "Papa Doc" Duvalier took power by force and ruled by brutally killing all opposition. Tens of thousands were tortured and killed under Duvalier and his son, Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier.

In 1990, Haitians elected Jean-Bertrand Aristide, a slum priest who inspired the overwhelmingly poor majority. But a military dictatorship overthrew Aristide 1991, sending thousands of Haitians to the seas in unsafe boats, desperate to get to Florida.

President Bill Clinton sent troops to Haiti in 1994 to restore Aristide, who was re-elected in 2000.

But his second term was weakened by accusations of corruption, and in 2004, after a military coup, a U.S. Marines airplane flew him to the Central African Republic.

The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Boniface Alexandre, took control until elections in 2006, when the current president, René Préval, was elected.

### **History of earthquakes**

Although the islands in the Caribbean are not considered one of the planet's most active earthquake zones, there is a history of large, devastating earthquakes.

Most of Haiti lies on the Gonave microplate, a sliver of the earth's crust between the much larger North American plate to the north and the Caribbean plate to the south.

Part of the southern fault zone broke and slid to cause the quake, according to Paul Mann, a senior research scientist at the Institute for Geophysics at the University of Texas, who described the event to the New York Times.

He said the fault is similar in structure to the San Andreas fault in California.

Such "strike-slip" events are shallow, but produce violent shaking at the surface and can be "very devastating, especially when there are cities nearby," Dr. Mann told the Times.

-- **Compiled by Leah Clapman for NewsHour Extra**

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