

Building Haiti's Future: Is Protectorate Status the Best Option?

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What happened in Haiti has no precedent. An earthquake as powerful as an atomic bomb has destroyed the capital of one of the poorest countries on earth. What is now needed is a genuine “re-foundation” of the country that gained its independence two centuries ago. Haiti is rightly proud to have been the first Caribbean country to gain its independence by force of arms, turning the ideal of equality of the French Revolution against its slave-trading colonial masters. But it has had its share of humiliations, from the reparation payments later imposed by France, which weighed on the development of the country throughout the 19th century, to the 19 years of US occupation (1915-1934), which improved the infrastructures, but deepened a sense of alienation and dependence. In Haiti, more than in other fragile state, the international community must show self-awareness of its past involvements with the country if it is to achieve any progress that is sustainable. Humility and respect for Haitian leadership are the condition of success.

Four priorities should shape the response of the international community:

- 1) First, agree with the Haitian authorities on the creation of an institution that will coordinate the reconstruction effort. It should be Haitian-led, but supported by the international community, with a Secretariat provided by the United Nations, the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank.
- 2) Second, provide financial aid for a development strategy that not only includes grants to fund basic infrastructure and to support the Haitian budget, but also gives guaranties for private investors in special economic zones, whose production will be granted free access to the US and the EU market, expanding existing tariff waivers. Ways should be found to involve the Haitian Diaspora, which already plays a key-role through its remittances.
- 3) Third, support a re-balancing between the capital and the rest of the country, and between urban and rural development. The growth of Port-au-Prince was encouraged by the Duvalier regime for reasons of political control and it has created an unsustainable situation, fueling resentment and urban decay.
- 4) Fourth, support a modernization of the political and judiciary institutions of Haiti: before the earthquake, three elections (legislative, constitutional, presidential) were to take place in less than ten months. This is manifestly impossible. In these exceptional circumstances, the United Nations is the right organization to help the Haitians address a very sensitive issue and find creative solutions that will streamline the political process and possibly accelerate badly needed institutional reform.

The people of Haiti are showing extraordinary resilience and dignity. Now is an opportunity to help them reverse their long history of humiliation.