

Why Is It Taking So Long to Get the Aid to the Haitian People?

by April Knutson

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All over the world ordinary people and governments have responded to the unprecedented disaster in Haiti, sending water, food, medical supplies, medical personnel. And a week after the earth-quake, much of that aid and many aid workers sit idle at the Port-au-Prince airport. Doctors Without Borders report that five of their planes were not allowed to land because U.S. military aircraft were commandeering the only runway.

The U.S. "aid" to Haiti is looking more and more like a military occupation with U.S. helicopters landing troops on the grounds of the Haitian National Palace. Priority has once again been given to "securing" the country rather than working with the Haitian people to bind their wounds and rebuild their country.

There is a long history of U.S. intervention in Haiti. After Haiti won independence from France in 1804, the U.S. colluded with France and all the Western powers in a blockade of the first Black republic to prevent trade and development; the U.S. occupation (1915-1934) began as an intervention to put down a peasant revolt aimed at retaking the land that U.S. agribusiness had stolen from the people. U.S. tax dollars have propped up brutal dictatorships and toppled democratic governments for years. The U.S. backed the two coups against Aristide, the democratically elected president, who had the temerity to say no to privatization schemes of the IMF and World Bank and to raise the minimum wage.

Now instead of their beloved President Aristide, the Haiti people are being asked to accept former presidents George W. Bush and Bill Clinton as directors of the rebuilding of Haiti! The CIA under George Herbert Walker Bush masterminded the first coup against Aristide in 1991; then he was kept in exile until 1994 and only returned to Haiti under the condition that he would permit privatization. In 2004, the Bush administration abducted Aristide, who had once again been elected in a democratic and fair election by the people of Haiti. Now Aristide is in exile in South Africa, forbidden to return to the Caribbean. Clinton is the U.N special envoy to Haiti. Transafrican founder Randall Robinson, a passionate Haiti advocate, characterizes Clinton's economic development plans for Haiti as the construction of more sweatshops for garment workers who earn 38 cents an hour.

We must demand that the Haitian people be in charge of rebuilding their country. There is no security threat in Haiti; imperialism is the danger! Contact your congressional representatives to demand an end to the militarization of aid to Haiti.

April Knutson teaches French and francophone literature and culture at the University of Minnesota. In 1999, she led a group of students to Haiti to do research and help community organizations there. Since then, she has traveled to Haiti several times to research women writers and work with women's organizations, including KOFIV, an organization of women rape victims helping other women who have suffered violent attacks during the coups against Aristide. KOFIV is supported by the Quixote Center Haiti Reborn Project. April Knutson is a member of the Haiti Justice Committee.

HAITI RESOURCES

These two websites are organizations April Knutson has worked with in Haiti:

www.haitikonpay.org

Plants trees and promotes sustainable agriculture in the Jacmel region. Now involved in rescue and rebuilding efforts.

www.heartswithhaiti.org

Hearts with Haiti, supports the St. Joseph Family's three orphanages: St. Joseph's Home for Boys in Port-au-Prince, Wings of Hope in the hills above Port-au-Prince, and Trinity House and School in Jacmel. April always stays at St. Joseph's when she is in Port- au-Prince; it was completely destroyed in the earthquake, but the orphans survived.

Another great organization on the ground in Haiti is Partners in Health, started by Dr. Paul Farmer.

Edwidge Danticat, *Brother I'm Dying*

Paul Farmer, *The Uses of Haiti*

Noam Chomsky, Paul Farmer, Amy Goodman, *Getting Haiti Right this Time*

Randall Robinson, *Unbroken Agony: Haiti Revolution to the Kidnapping of a President*

John Maxwell's column, "No Mister You Cannot Share My Pain"