



The Haitian Connection Newsletter

Lorraine Antieau, Editor

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Notes from Renate

Dear friends,

It is with deepest gratitude that we thank our donors for your generosity during 2023. Because of your year-end gifts, Haitian Connection has the funds to maintain our current programs in 2024! Despite these tragic times in Haiti, we can continue providing help to the people of the Jeremie region through the afterschool program, scholarships, and mental health agents, along with other projects, such as the community oven. Because of your gifts, we were able to increase the amount of the Cash Without Conditions stipend this month. In addition, we will be supporting 150 young people from four different communities for camp during Carnival. This will keep them off the street and reduce their risk of danger. The people of Jeremie we have been helping are not abandoned and they are so grateful!

Thank you from the bottoms of our hearts,
Renate

More from Renate's Desk:

Update: Schools have been closed for four weeks now, due to political unrest, and shooting incidents are increasing. This week's victims included a 5-year-old child. These types of events have been previously unheard of in quiet Jeremie.

Haiti is fighting a forgotten war. While we at Haitian Connection always want to highlight the positive, at times we need to remember the general suffering of the Haitian people. Please read the two following pieces for some sobering facts:

The War Has Not Left Jeremie Unscathed by Renate Schneider

Guy Phillipe, the former coup leader and senator from Haiti, returned to his own country in November after serving more than 6 years in US jail on drug related charges. Since then, he has been touring the country, attracting sizable crowds. Ariel Henri, the de facto prime minister, has the support of the US, which Phillipe criticized on January 2 while visiting the Massacre River Canal. Phillipe also announced that he will lead a "revolution" in 2024.



Phillipe, who is from the Grand'Anse, the department that Jeremie is in, is very popular in that region. His supporters have now launched a protest, demanding that Prime Minister Ariel step down. They have heightened their voices by blocking roads and lighting tires on fire in the streets of Jeremie and many other cities in Haiti. Demonstrators have forced the closures of schools, government agencies, and private businesses in Jeremie as well as in Miragoane and Quanamthe.

The Haitian Times

UN report: Nearly 5000 people killed in Haiti in 2023 by Juhakenson Blaise, January 24 2024

PORT-AU-PRINCE—In its latest report about Haiti for 2023, the United Nations says 4,789 people were killed and kidnappings surged from 1,359 cases in 2022 to 2,490. “I am appalled by the staggering level of gang violence, which continues to escalate and is destroying the lives of Haitians, particularly in Port-au-Prince,” said United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres. “Gang-related homicide and kidnapping rates have increased, forcing hundreds of thousands of people to abandon their homes.”

The report, submitted to the United States Security Council and made public on Jan. 21, paints an overall grim picture of Haiti. The accumulated data shows the persistently high levels of violence Haitians endured throughout the past year, speaking to the deepening political, humanitarian, security, and human rights crises. The document also sheds light on the complexities Haiti faces, including the recent attack on Solino gang and crimes along the national highway in Mariani. With the new year already witnessing more than 63 fatalities by mid- January - making prospects for improvement in 2024 also seem bleak. Following are the major findings by topic area from the UN report:

HOMICIDES AND KIDNAPPINGS NEARLY DOUBLED

The departments of West, where Port-au-Prince sits, and the Artibonite were the most affected by the “indiscriminate violence” fueled by armed gang attacks against civilians and police.

- Homicides increased by 119.4% compared to 2022, from 2,183 reported to 4,789. The dead include 465 women, 93 boys and 48 girls.
- Kidnappings increased by 83% compared to 2022, from 1,359 to 2,490.

LAW ENFORCEMENT NUMBERS, CAPACITY IN DECLINE

Armed bandits attacked or disabled about 10% of police stations in attempts to eliminate the police presence.

- More than 45 police stations, out of the 412 nationwide, were attacked
- Among the areas with police stations most affected are the sub-police stations of Cité-Soleil, La Saline, Village-de-Dieu and Martissant, in the metropolitan area of Port-au-Prince, had been deserted for two years, following repeated gang attacks. like “Team Asansè” and “5 Second”
- Fort-Jacques, Onaville, Pernier, Savane Pistache and Thomazeau (West Department),
- Liancourt (Artibonite Department)
- Saut-d’Eau (Center Department)
- Gaillard (South East Department)

Police officers leaving force. Haitian National Police (PNH) staff numbers have declined at an alarming rate. In 2023:

- 13,196 agents, including 1,588 women, were on the force.
- 1,663 police officers, including 152 women, had left the institution.
- 48 officers were killed and 75 injured

In November, police launched a four-month accelerated basic training program to recruit 796 cadets, including 116 women.

Armored cars damaged.

Only 21 of the 47 armored vehicles were operational as of November. 19 were seriously damaged during anti-gang operations.” \$205 million budget insufficient. Gutierrez said the PNH budget rose by 13% to \$205 million, or 27.41 billion gourdes, but it’s not enough.

Prisons overcrowded

- Haiti’s prisons total capacity is 3,900.
- However, they held 11,778 inmates, including 369 women, 236 boys and 44 girls.
- Gangs damaged a newly-build women’s prison in Cabaret, leaving it unusable.

DISPLACEMENT AND IMPACT ON LIVELIHOOD

Residents have been forced to flee, subjected to sexual violence and other human rights abuses.

- An estimated 34% living below the \$2.15/day international poverty line in 2023
- Forced displacement after gang attacks contributed to extreme vulnerability, forcing sales of homes and people having to take on loans to survive
- Economic challenges include a reduction in household income, a drop in remittances, and increased poverty rates
- Persistent food insecurity linked to a local production deficit, market supply chain dysfunction, and illegal activities by gangs, imposing heavy fees and restricting the flow of goods

Sexual exploitation and abuse

- Gangs use sexual violence systematically to control the population
- IOM, guided by the Victim’s Rights Advocate, assists 35 mothers and their 41 children born of sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations personnel.

Cash Without Conditions Update

Several have asked about if we are continuing the cash without conditions program. This program is a literal life saver for the 10 women we support. One of the participants commented that without the stipend she and her 3 children would no longer be alive. We are continuing the program, and have even increased the amount this month to compensate in part for the rampant inflation.

Oven Project Nears Completion



Despite the incredible difficulties and obstacles to getting anything done in Haiti, we are happy to report that the oven project in Latibolye is moving forward, if slowly. The building that will house the oven is basically completed and now the work on the oven can itself can get started, so that the women's group in Latibolye can start baking and gaining some financial stability through their own activity. Patience is a virtue, but we are seeing the light at the end of the tunnel.



Afterschool Program Fills the Gap as Schools Close Due to Violence



Because of continuing unrest and daily demonstrations with people killed by gunshots, schools have been closed for the four weeks. Our afterschool program has jumped into the gap, and moved the program hours to the morning, rather than the afternoon. The students are motivated and the parents are very grateful. In fact, we have a waiting list of kids hoping to get into our program. We strict and insist that the students arrive on time. If a student is late more than 3 times a month, he or she is dismissed from the program, and a new child will take their place. This program, thanks to our dedicated staff, is truly a lifesaver for many of our young charges.



Mental Health Agents Stand in Solidarity with the Suffering



The important role our community mental health agents plays in today's Jeremie cannot be overstated. "I often feel anxious, stressed, and get angry easily," says one young man. A young woman is so distraught by what is going on in the country, she can barely talk. She cries, and with only a glimmer of hope, she says "Only God can bring a change." Even people in Jeremie will tell you they are fine, after some probing it comes out that they are

incredibly stressed, have problems sleeping, worried about their future, and especially the future of their kids. It is hard to imagine how it feels when life as you know it is unravelling before your eyes. Our community mental health agents on Deschamps and Latiboliere work with the people, holding them up by talking with them, but mostly by listening to all that they suffer. They are truly companions in solidarity, creating bonds among participants and with each other.



Scholarship Student Maintains Academic Excellence

Haitian Connection asks for grade reports from all our scholarship students. Melchie at the University of the Grand'Anse (UNOGA) in Dekade (Jeremie) is getting excellent grades. She is in the second semester of her 3rd year in agricultural studies. As a future agricultural entrepreneur, she got a grade of 100 in accounting. 100 is the highest grade with 65 being a passing grade for a course. Grading in Haitian universities is a lot stricter than in American universities. Melchie is also excelling in ecology and topography. She passed all her courses. Her results are even more impressive when one considers the huge stress people in Haiti are living under for the last two years, and we wish her well for the rest of this year. Melchie anticipates graduating in 2025.



Former Scholarship Recipient Continues Impact



When I met Moise Iraus, I was the Rectrice of the University of Fondwa. I immediately recognize the talent, intelligence, and motivation of Moise, and Haitian Connection paid his scholarship. He studied at the management faculty, and later received his Master's degree in management from a university in Belgium. Once I started working at the University of the



Nouvelle Grand'Anse Moise joined us in charge of the IT department. He was an amazing asset to the university. In the meantime, he started a microcredit organization in Fondwa to benefit the small farmers in the area. They were able to take out small loans to help purchase seeds, farming implements, and even medication for the farm animals. Over the years, Fondase, the microcredit organization grew, and they now have their own building. Such an accomplishment. They are now planning to convert to solar energy rather than using a generator for electricity. This will provide Fondase with energy independence, a crucial endeavor, because gas or diesel are not always readily available and very expensive. Fondase is much appreciated in the community, and Moise has shown great leadership potential. He is currently in Canada to work on his third Master's in cyber security. He will be finished this year. If you are interested in supporting this project you can send funds to Haitian Connection and we will make sure Fondase will receive the funds

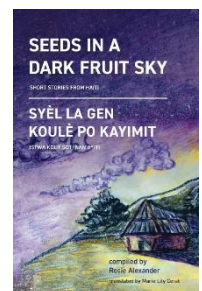
Book Corner

Seeds In a Dark Fruit Sky by Rosie Alexander (Author), Amanda Orozco (Editor), Wynnie Lamour (Editor), Marie Lily Caret (Translator)

Seeds in a Dark Fruit Sky is a collection of true short stories from Haitian storytellers in Jérémie, Haiti. Written side by side in both Haitian Creole and English, this collection is a celebration of the Haitian language and can also be used as a language learning resource for either native speaker.

Haitian Creole has been the common language of the Haitian people for centuries, but it was not recognized as an official language of Haiti until 1987. French was and is still seen as the “upper-class” language of Haiti and the language of education. Schools still primarily teach only French even though Haitian Creole is the language spoken by all Haitians, and only 20% of the population speak French.

This collection of stories offers a glimpse into daily life in Haiti. Each story moves us beyond the natural disasters and tragic headlines that, for most, has defined Haiti. **Seeds in a Dark Fruit Sky** is an opportunity to learn about the real human experiences of these storytellers and hopes to open the way for more Haitian Creole centered literature in the future.



Haitian Connection

Haitian Connection is a 501(c) (3) tax exempt organization founded in 2005, which focuses on the needs of women, children, and young adults in the Jérémie region of southwest Haiti. A variety of projects have already touched thousands of lives: houses have been built for more than 97 women and their children; a small microcredit program is providing economic opportunity for women in 2 communities; a potable water initiative is giving healthy water to one thousand families; and local school teachers have received training in the Child-to-Child method. Haitian Connection's Divergent Thinking Institute is providing Divergent Thinking seminars all over Haiti.

As a response to the earthquake in January 2010, and its psychological aftermath, Haitian Connection has established a mental health program in Jérémie to provide counseling as people resettle, tally their losses, and adjust to a new reality. 27 members of the community have been trained in psychological first aid. This served the greater Jérémie area well after Hurricane Matthew in October of 2016. Our mental health agents were able to hold community meetings to give people an opportunity to debrief and receive some training in stress reduction techniques.

Support Us

Haitian Connection is a 501(c) (3) nonprofit corporation registered in Illinois and your gifts are tax deductible. Our projects depend on volunteers and the financial support of people who desire to help.

The cost of building a home for a woman and her family in Jérémie is \$2,000. The houses have three rooms and a latrine. You could contribute to a house, or even get your church/organization to sponsor a whole house. After Hurricane Matthew, this has become a priority for people in the region.

Scholarships for needy students from elementary to secondary schools.

Microcredit group: contributions accepted.

Mental Health Program: contributions to mental health center accepted (total cost for one year \$10,000)

Support for training programs in Divergent Thinking, mental health, Child-to-Child, and continuing education. For every program for 25 people, we provide a meal for all participants and give the facilitators a stipend (about \$500 per training).

To support our projects financially, donate online by visiting our website at: www.HaitianConnection.org and clicking on the PayPal button.

If you would prefer to send your donation by mail, please address checks to: **Haitian Connection**
5300 South Shore Drive # 27
Chicago, IL 60615

Get Involved

We are looking for volunteers: English teachers, educators, specialists in various fields to give short conferences or seminars. To volunteer, contact **Renate Schneider** at haitianconnection@gmail.com or by phone at **312/493-3719**; in Haiti: **011/509/3 463-7532**

