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**Haiti's Lingering Agony**

**The African World**

**By Bill Fletcher, Jr.**

**BlackCommentator.com Executive Editor**

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Slightly more than a year ago, a Haitian associate of mine was kidnapped in Haiti and, from the looks of it, was murdered. His body has not been recovered and nothing has been heard from him. Despite significant international attention to his case, Lovinsky Pierre Antoine, a noted Haitian activist and leader, an associate of deposed President Jean Bertrand Aristide, has been "disappeared."

Lovinsky's story is not a story of an isolated incident. It has become emblematic of the ongoing instability on the western half of the island of Hispaniola. News of the continued occupation of Haiti, gang violence, and the repression of the Haitian people gets little attention in US media circles. Many of us were led to believe that with the election of President Rene Preval that all would be right with the world. That has not come to pass. We continue to witness tragedies inflicted on the people. Most recently, another food riot exploded due to the high cost of basic foods. The situation has become so dire in parts of Haiti that people are eating, quite literally, mud pies in order to stave off hunger.

Haiti has not been a 2008 US Presidential campaign issue. I would wager that it has not been mentioned by either of the major candidates. Yet, the Haitian misery is a matter that an incoming Administration must address, if for no other reason than that the most recent episode in this tragedy can be laid at the doorstep of the USA itself, i.e., the USA was directly implicated in the overthrow of the democratically elected president of Haiti, President Aristide.

A continued United Nations presence in Haiti, at least through the direct involvement of

Brazilian troops, does nothing to improve the situation. The Brazilian troops, initially welcomed as friends of the Haitian people, have come to be viewed as nothing more than agents of the interests of the Bush administration. Instead of suppressing criminal gangs, or anti-government provocateurs, they have been used to suppress supporters of Aristide's political party, Fanmi Lavalas. The UN presence is an occupation and it is not stabilizing the situation or rooting out the criminal elements.

There is a viable US role in this situation, but not what is usually suggested. There are major development issues facing Haiti - both environmental and economic - with which the country will need help. The poverty of the country has been such that deforestation has been used as a means of gaining charcoal for the survival of significant sections of the rural population. A Re-forestation program will be needed as part of a major rebuilding of the country. This must be accompanied by a larger plan for economic reconstruction that is based on the needs of the Haitian people. In that regard, it will inevitably involve a major role for both the public sector and foreign governmental support, a fact that goes against the so-called conventional wisdom of those who follow the line of thought of the International Monetary Fund, World Bank or the Bush administration.

Haiti's lingering agony should be acknowledged as also our agony. The USA has never allowed Haiti to develop itself on an independent basis. From the time of Haitian independence in 1804 through the coup against President Aristide in 2004 on through today, the US government has been regularly interfering in the internal affairs of the Haitian people totally unafraid or unapologetic when it came to destabilizing and/or overthrowing governments with which it disagreed. Lovinsky Pierre Antoine was one of a long list of casualties in this struggle. I wish that I could say and believe that he would be among the last. Short of significant changes in US foreign policy, that is highly doubtful.

It must be insisted that whoever is elected to the White House in November, 2008 charts a new path in the relationship with Haiti. Criminal activities on the part of our own government do not vanish simply because we no longer hear about them.


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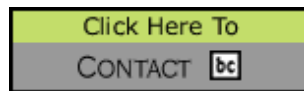
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