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LETTER TO FRIENDS OF SISTER EMMANUELLE

LETTRE N°107

«HAITI SPECIAL »

MARCH 2010

« *One does not measure poverty like
an earthquake, on a Richter scale!* »

Dear Friends,

To you who have generously supported the unfortunate Haitians, and who relied on us to give them aid, we want to address this special letter to inform you of the actions taken to date.

You know that the earthquake in Haiti made probably 500 000 deaths. Only 220 000 corpses have been found and buried in mass graves. Many victims have disappeared into the depths of the earth when it opened and closed again over the collapsed buildings.

It is estimated that 1.5 million persons have escaped from the worst hit regions. They are forming a population of homeless IDPs, most often without any livelihood whatsoever.

A container has left Geneva on the 15th of February with food, clothing and medicines. It is expected to arrive mid-March in Hinche.



Our thanks go to all the people who have made this shipment possible, in particular Mr. Cedric Ricou and his colleagues from the company Star Logistique, Mr. Amos Cherfils Dubois from the association Cris d'Enfants, all those who have struggled to raise funds (including the musicians of "The Spirit Blues Band", and the Facebook group « Genève Solidaire avec la population d'Haïti ») and those who opened their heart and their wallet.

Jean-Claude François, the vice-president of Haiti-Cosmos and the project manager on the spot, has returned to Geneva in late February. After the disaster, he decided to extend for several weeks his usual stay in Hinche.

On January 10, two days before the initial quake, he was in Port-au-Prince to arrange for the purchase of a tractor by the Association. But, fortunately, his appointment failed to turn up, and he decided to return immediately to Hinche!...

So at the time of the earthquake, he was working at home, when he suddenly felt the tremors and heard a great racket coming from town. He went out and saw that many buildings had trembled.

Fortunately, those of Haiti-Cosmos –the clinics, the school, and the lab-, suffered only minor damage. According to the engineer called upon by Jean-Claude, apart from some cracks in the plaster or in the cinderblock, the structure of the buildings has not been damaged.

Hinche, is located 108 km from Port-au-Prince and **usually has 133 000 inhabitants**. Within a few days after the disaster, **60 000 displaced people flocked into the city**. Many arrived by accident, having jumped into the vehicles that fled the capital before the impending aftershocks. Among the many wounded, those whose life was threatened by gangrene often had limbs amputated. The country now has a large population of cripples.

With other personalities from Hinche, **Jean-Claude immediately formed a reception committee that identified the newcomers, assessed their needs, heard their grievance, provided them with accommodation and care if necessary.** Most



of the displaced have been hosted by local people. Families of 8 now have almost 20 people! French and American NGOs (Caritas, Visions of the World), and the French Embassy as well, have sent food and tents for 2,000 people. With the rainy season coming, the precarious situation of this displaced population is bound to worsen.

Then Jean-Claude focused on the situation of the young people. Within a few days, with displaced teachers who were glad to find some work, **he managed to establish a school for 785 youths** who had not found a place in the schools of Hinche. He set it up in the premises of Polytec (whose students have agreed to attend classes outside of school hours), and has also located two classes in our clinic in Hinche. **Class started on 1 February**. We can fund this new secondary school until the end of the school year in June.

A major challenge, already taken up by the humanitarian and the government players, **is the integration of this displaced population in Hinche**. The authorities have presented the Central Plateau, where Hinche is located, as the safest place in the country, away from the seismic fault that destroyed, in addition to the capital, five towns in the department of the West. Hinche has to adapt to this situation and is destined to develop itself.

Immediately after the school started to operate Jean-Claude was visited by a delegation, who had just heard about his action in favour of the schoolchildren, and who asked for his help on behalf of thousands of university students now displaced in Hinche. He then contacted the Dean of the University Jean Price-Mars in Port-au-Prince who **quickly agreed to establish a university project** with our training centre Polytec. Jean-Claude also obtained the State agreement that his school could be used in the afternoon after school hours to teach courses to university students as from March 29. Needless to say the students were very pleased with all these initiatives.

Hinche could become in future a university town, with faculties of computer science, economics, agronomy, civil engineering, etc ... This development is all the more likely that the main road between Port-au-Prince and Hinche is already in the process of modernization: while it used to take 6 to 8 hours during the rainy season to cover the 108 km between the two cities, it only takes two hours now, on the new, almost completed, asphalt road.

There have even been some statements about transferring the capital to Hinche ..

Since he returned to Geneva, Jean-Claude has resumed work. But he has also made the first contacts with the University of Geneva and the Grangettes clinic to propose to collaborate with us on this University project.

Dear and faithful donors, please remember SVDP and our children in Sudan who still need you! THANK YOU!