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Haiti's Progress

Martha Randolph Carr 8/4/2008

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By Martha Randolph Carr

Haiti is a country that has defied change in the worst possible ways for all of its existence. However, there are signs that perhaps there is hope at last for the poorest country in the Western hemisphere. Two recent announcements have the potential to create some real and lasting change for the impoverished Caribbean country. Last Thursday, a new female prime minister, Michele Pierre-Louis was ratified after several stalled attempts paving the way for the delayed senate elections and desperately needed foreign aid. Ms. Pierre-Louis, 61 and an educator comes from the Open Society Institute founded by George Soros, which works to promote emerging democracies and human rights. Perhaps it was worth the wait to gain such a fresh perspective in a country that also survived Francois 'Papa Doc' Duvalier's reign of terror.



The other piece of good news came when the charity, Mercy & Sharing, which was founded by American, Susie Krabacher in 1994 specifically to aid Haitian children recently announced plans to double their footprint in Haiti with a 16 acre, 38,000 square foot development in Williamson, located about an hour away from Port au Prince.

The new facilities, expected to open by end of 2009 will include another orphanage, a feeding center expected to serve 500 people per day, a hospice for terminally ill and disabled children, a vocational school with a capacity for 100 children and a primary school that will initially teach 200 children and eventually expand to 500 students.

The small country has known mostly violence since its inception when all of the indigenous people were pushed into extinction and replaced by African settlers. Since then most of its rich natural resources have been destroyed with only 7 percent of the original forest still remaining leading to soil erosion and loss of minerals as well as extensive contamination of the water supply. None of the country's water is considered potable.

Haiti sits across a spit of ocean from Cuba and Guantanamo Bay and only 750 miles off the coast of Florida. Malnutrition, disease, lack of education and unemployment have been staples of Haitian life along with a steady stream of violence.

In April, deadly riots over food shortages lead to the government ousting Prime Minister Jacques Edouard Alexis without thinking of the consequences of having no one to name in his place. For months, no one was legally capable of signing for foreign aid as the price of rice continued to rise. Mercy & Sharing, which already operates feeding centers in Port au Prince watched as greater numbers of people struggled to eat. "People who could have afforded rice two years ago can't buy it now. The price has doubled," said Krabacher. But the outside world could do very little as they watched two previous candidates for prime minister fail to achieve a majority vote and a stalemate continue as the populated went hungry.

One of the greatest hopes Krabacher has from the new projects, which will cost \$1.7 million

from donations is that out of the children they are helping to raise will come Haiti's future leaders. Krabacher has a little experience with starting from where you are with what you have to offer. She began the charity with an idea, a 10th grade education and limited savings and has helped to build facilities that already include orphanages, a hospital, day clinic, feeding center and schools. They are the most successful charity operating in Haiti today despite death threats and corruption in areas where other charities have given up and left town. Krabacher, along with her husband, Joe, an attorney in Colorado, even pay for all of the charity's administrative costs out of their own pockets so that 100 percent of all donations can go directly to the projects in Haiti.

There's still a very long road ahead before Haiti turns any kind of corner toward self-sufficiency or even the promise of peace for its people but at last there are signs that progress is being made.

Martha Randolph Carr's latest book, *A Place to Call Home* about the reemergence of U.S. orphanages is available wherever books are sold. If you'd like Martha to come and speak to your group visit: www.newvoicespeakers.com. Author's email: Martha@caglecartoons.com or visit www.martharandolphcarr.com. If you'd like to learn more about Mercy & Sharing go to www.HaitiChildren.com.

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