



Solidarity News Notes...

News from the Rich in Mercy Institute – Summer 2023

Unrelenting Gang Violence in Port au Prince Pushes Haiti Towards a Breaking Point



Armed gangs, described as “predatory”, control some 90% of Haiti’s capital leaving entire neighborhoods without access to water, food and health care. The **UN security council** has called on secretary-general, Antonio Guterres, to present “a full range” of options within 30 days to improve the security situation, and to combat illegal arms trafficking.

A **UN special envoy** described the country as “bruised by violence, misery, fear and suffering” adding that “It is urgent to take action. The survival of the entire nation is at stake.”

Under consideration are increased support for Haiti’s police force as well as deployment of an international military force in sufficient quantity to disable and disarm the gangs.

Haitian activists and popular leaders agree that the current situation is untenable and is pushing Haiti towards a breaking point, but widely recognized police corruption and collusion with the gangs are obstacles to resolving the crisis. Critics point out that Haiti “has been stolen from, denigrated, and suffocated” by previous foreign interventions and another “reset” will not resolve the current crisis without a long-term commitment to rebuilding the economy and democratic institutions.



Vision of “Regenerating Haiti” Inspires University Interns at “Operation Hummingbird”



The north of Haiti is largely insulated from the impact of armed gangs in Haiti’s capital. There **Lamothe Lormier**, director of the **Operation Hummingbird Center** is realizing a vision of “**Regenerating Haiti**”, by developing low-input strategies to resist drought, control flooding, integrate animal husbandry, and restore soil health in order to increase agricultural production under challenging conditions and with minimal impact on the environment. .

Agronomy faculty from three of Haiti’s leading universities have recognized the significance and potential of these efforts, and have committed to including rotating internships at the **Operation**

Hummingbird Center as part of the formal education of Haiti’s next generation of agricultural experts.

Students from Haiti’s state university, **Université d’État d’Haïti (UEH)** have already begun training at the **Center** through a succession of internships over a 6 month period, during which they will engage in hands-on learning that includes planting “cover crops”, digging “planting pits”, developing “worm composting” and “aquaponics” as well as “azolla production” and “black soldier fly larvae” animal food production.



Spiritan Summer Program Targets Highly Motivated, Above-Average Students



Continued gang violence and kidnappings in Port au Prince have caused repeated disruptions and school closures during the past academic year. The Ministry of Education extended the school year to help students make up lost days. Even the most motivated students are at risk of falling behind in their education.

Spiritan priest, **Fr. Patrick Eugene, C.S.Sp.**, has organized a summer tutorial and enrichment program aimed at high-achieving and highly motivated students – youth whose talent and commitment offer hope for Haiti’s future. The campus of the Spiritan **Kolej Sen Masyel** (St. Martial College) welcomed more than 100 participants in the summer program which focuses on logical reasoning, critical thinking, oral and written communication, and intensive work in “English expression”. Additionally participants will enjoy a cooked meal as part of the day’s shared activities.



Teachers for the summer program have been recruited from the most skilled professionals who comprise the regular **Sen Masyel** faculty. Teachers will act as facilitators and guides to encourage “peer to peer” learning among academically gifted students and to foster self confidence and leadership development. Student participants will receive a certificate of achievement upon successful completion of the summer program.

Emergency Relief Restores Hope to Vulnerable Families Suffering Drought and Flood



Planting season in south west Haiti began in the spring, but some highly-vulnerable farmers experienced the loss of crops due to an extended drought in what would normally be the “rainy season”. When rains returned, vulnerable farmers used up reserve seed to replant corn and beans only to experience severe flooding which wiped out their second planting.

Rich in Mercy provided emergency relief to vulnerable families through the **House of Mercy**, an intentional community of (lay) men and women committed to contemplative prayer and social action in **Fonfred**. Relief to the most vulnerable consisted of food to offset famine and funds to purchase new seeds.

Women’s Solidarity in Africa Builds Hope, Confidence, and Increased Self-Reliance

The mission of **Rich in Mercy** (RIM) is “to promote a global culture of solidarity”. In the Katanga slum of Kampala, Uganda members of the women’s solidarity group called **Mirembe**, who are at high risk for human trafficking, are demonstrating the life-transforming power of local solidarity combined with international support.

Quarterly **RIM** grants support multiple levels of entrepreneurship. Capitalization funds help women launch small businesses, grow existing small businesses, and trade already-successful businesses for new, potentially more profitable ones. Businesses have transitioned from “hawking” in restricted areas to legal places of business.

At weekly group meetings women contribute to a common “solidarity fund” from their modest profits. The fund, available to all the members, provides increased resillience, self-reliance, and independence by helping women during times of struggle to pay rent, clear medical bills, or purchase a small, but productive, piece of land.

International support also aids with nutritional support for children and support for school fees which may not otherwise be affordable on the modest earnings from small businesses. Organized by **Sr. Bibian Thuguci**, a sister of Our Lady of the Good Shepherd, the **Mirembe** women also receive counsel from a social worker to encourage proper sanitation, financial discipline, and responsible parenting. More than 150 women benefit from the program allowing women to experience a new level of “**mirembe**” – a Swahili word that means “peace”!

