



## *Solidarity News Notes...*

*News from the Rich in Mercy Institute – Winter 2021*

### **Intersecting Political, Economic, & Humanitarian Crises Threaten Social Stability in Haiti**

What began two years ago as a political and economic crisis in Haiti has become a full-blown humanitarian crisis centered in the capital of Port au Prince and radiating through the entire country. Food prices have skyrocketed. Gasoline and diesel fuel are often unavailable. Electricity and cell phone service are sporadic at best. Government ineffectiveness and police corruption have widened the space in which armed and violent gangs operate, resulting in a steady increase in arson attacks, kidnappings, rapes and killings.



Following the July assassination of Haiti's president, gangs seized more power. In the absence of jobs increasingly desperate young people turn to gang membership as their only alternative to survive in an economy in free fall. More than 90 gangs with thousands of members control whole neighborhoods in Haiti's capital of Port au Prince. Armed with hand guns and automatic weapons, the gangs have grown more powerful under successive government administrations that undermined state controls by encouraging gangs and exploiting them politically. Gangs now command more fire power than the police and control one third of the capital and land access to half of the country.

General strikes, with support from nearly all sectors of society – including participation by bishops, priests, and religious – have shut down businesses, schools, and public transportation in Port au Prince and beyond, in protest against the lack of fuel and the country's worsening economic and security conditions. Hospitals and clinics, dependent on generators for electricity and crippled without access to fuel, are nearing collapse.

A broad coalition of Haitian grassroots organizations is calling on the international community to support the formation of a transition government tasked with restoring order through substantive reform of the police and restoration of the rule of law in order to create conditions for – and carry out – a fair election of a new Haitian president and parliament.

### **Earthquake Devastation in Grand Sud Region Prompts Emergency Relief Distribution**

In August a massive earthquake in Haiti's Grand Sud region (southern peninsula) resulted in at least 1000 deaths and multiple thousands of damaged or destroyed houses and public buildings. **Rich in Mercy**, in collaboration with Spiritan priest **Fr. Patrick Eugene, CSSp** and a network of reliable priest and personal contacts in the region, made available emergency relief in the form of food, water, hygiene supplies, and temporary shelters to more than 150 families in six rural villages that lacked access to other forms of immediate assistance. The distributed supplies included rice and beans, spaghetti, dried herring, sardines, cooking oil, sugar and soap.



Financial support for the emergency relief came from generous individual donors to **Rich in Mercy**, support from **Mother of Sorrows Outreach** (Murrysville, PA) and the **Spiritan Office of Mission Advancement** (Houston, TX). **Rich in Mercy** will partner with additional funders to assist in the reconstruction phase of earthquake recovery and is currently preparing a strategy that targets highly vulnerable widows and single mothers who are among the least able to access other forms of aid. A similar strategy was employed after hurricane Matthew ravaged the same southern region in 2016. Happily, all of the houses that were repaired or rebuilt in 2016 with funding from **Rich in Mercy** remained intact during the August earthquake. The same disaster-resistant house model will be employed in the reconstruction of earthquake-damaged houses.

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## Compact “Bio-Digester” Models “Closed Loop” Strategy for Sustainable Agriculture



The **Operation Hummingbird Environmental and Educational Center (OHEEC)** in Dubre, Haiti is committed to the exploration and implementation of low-input strategies designed to help small-scale farmers in rural Haiti increase food production and meet related needs with minimal impact on the environment. In Haiti most cooking is done on open fires fueled with wood or, in urban settings, charcoal made from wood. Use of alternative fuels such as propane is limited by access and affordability. With a grant from **Rich in Mercy**, **OHEEC** is piloting a “closed loop” strategy that will utilize agricultural waste such as animal manure and sugar cane refuse (“bagasse”) to produce bio-gas for cooking and generate natural, organic fertilizer.



The strategy uses a “bio-digester” tank and anaerobic digestion of the organic waste material to produce and capture bio-gas for cooking. A bi-product of the system is a nutrient “slurry” that can be used directly as fertilizer or to feed the growth of *azzolla* in a specially constructed pond (right). *Azolla* is a nitrogen-fixing, protein-rich, fast-growing aquatic plant useful as a fertilizer or as an accelerator in conventional composting. A second bio-digester will be piloted by **OHEEC** in Thiotte with funding from the **Madison West Towne – Middleton Rotary** (Madison, WI).

## “Odds-Defying” Student Preparing to “Give Back”, Nears Goal of Becoming a Doctor



**Peterson Alcius** began to dream of becoming a medical doctor when his mother died for lack of emergency medical care in the earthquake that devastated Port au Prince in 2010. But with his mother’s death the family lacked funds to pay for his school fees and Peterson was forced to drop out of secondary school. A **Rich in Mercy** scholarship enabled him to resume his studies and for each of the next four years he ranked number one in his class!



After graduating first in his secondary school class in 2014, Peterson won a full scholarship to study medicine at a prestigious university in Santiago, Cuba. Before going there he had to learn

Spanish – his third language! Despite the challenges of culture, language, and separation from his family, after one year he ranked number two in his med school class.

Peterson continues to excel academically and next year expects to receive his medical degree. Recalling his mother’s death from lack of medical care, he is committed to using his knowledge and skill to “save lives” and create educational opportunities for other Haitian youth in order to “give back” and as a way of investing in Haiti’s future!

## Talent, Effort, and Solidarity Generate US Scholarships for Determined Haitian Woman



In 1998 **Alexandre Hector** was a recent high-school graduate and new employee of FONKOZE, a micro-finance agency serving poor women in Haiti founded by **Fr. Joseph Philippe, CSSp** and **Anne Hastings** and now recognized as a global leader in the field. Because of his service and commitment, he was chosen to pioneer an educational program for FONKOZE employees offered at **Duquesne University** (Pittsburgh, PA) and supported by the **Pittsburgh Regional Haiti Solidarity Committee**.

More than 20 years later his daughter, **Saskya**, 19, an outstanding student in Haiti, was determined to pursue higher education in the US. She successfully applied for admission to Duquesne and the university awarded her more than \$20,000 in merit scholarships! Additionally, friends of FONKOZE and members of the Pittsburgh Regional Haiti Solidarity Committee partnered with **Rich in Mercy** to create a solidarity scholarship fund of more than \$20,000 to cover the cost of her first year. Saskya is majoring in business finance and intends to return to Haiti to establish a micro-insurance program that will complement FONKOZE’s micro-finance program for poor and “ultra-poor” women in Haiti,.