



## Solidarity News Notes...

*News from the Rich in Mercy Institute – Summer 2025*

### ***Armed Gangs Use High-Tech to Expand Control and Attack Schools and Hospitals,***

The Haitian population is being exploited, raped, kidnapped and recruited by armed gangs based mainly in Haiti's capital, **Port au Prince**, but increasingly expanding into other areas of the country. Gangs control more than 90% of the capital and access from it to most of the country. They both compete and coordinate with each other using "high tech" drones, sophisticated communication devices, and weapons more powerful than those available to the poorly-equipped Haitian police. Systematically terrorizing the population, the gangs have destroyed more than 300 schools and dozens of hospitals, leaving many children without places to learn and the sick without places to seek care.

The population is increasingly malnourished and facing famine since gang control of ports and transportation routes has caused food shortages and doubling of prices. The **United Nations** estimates that more than 1.5 million Haitians are at risk of starvation – half of them children. More than 1.3 million people are displaced from their homes with many living in shelters or refugee camps, and others migrating to poor rural communities where growing numbers have increased demand for food and housing while putting severe strain on the remaining educational and health care resources in already poor rural communities.



### ***Sisters' Visionary Initiative Increases Food Security for Vulnerable Children and Families***

The **Sisters of St. Antoine of Fondwa** base their lives on St. Francis. Like Francis they have a profound appreciation for the "web of life" and recognize their dependence on healthy soil and food production that respects the natural ecology of their region. With financial support from **Rich in Mercy** the sisters are developing 12 acres of land with the aim of increasing food security in Fondwa, which has experienced a massive influx of displaced persons fleeing the gang violence in and around Port au Prince..



After one year of husbanding the land, this visionary "**Food Security Initiative**" is producing sufficient food for about half the needs of the sisters and the 65 children in their **Fatima House Orphanage** and about one quarter of the daily support provided to highly vulnerable, refugee families who depend on the sisters for their continued survival.

The farm is producing black beans, sweet potatoes, and corn – all of which are staples in Haiti. Uniquely positioned as the only rice-producing enterprise in the region, the sisters' farm also yields substantial quantities of rice, which is foundational to the Haitian diet.. This chemical-free, organic rice will become the basis of a commercial business that will generate income to help sustain the farm productivity over time.

The farm currently provides rotating 15 day periods of employment for laborers, thus providing supplementary income to workers from 70 different families. The long-term plan for the farm calls for three production cycles each year. Eventually production will provide food for more than 300 children enrolled in the sisters' preschools in **Gotiron** and **Kafelomppe** and more than 500 children enrolled in the **St. Antoine** primary and secondary schools operated by the sisters in Fondwa.



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## Scholarship Students Defy Poverty, Hunger, and Homelessness to Pursue Education

Education remains the foundation for long-term, positive and systemic change in Haiti. For children born into generational poverty – either in Haiti’s capital of **Port au Prince**, or in any of hundreds of rural communities – even the prospect of education is often beyond reach. **Rich in Mercy (RIM)** provides more than 100 primary and secondary school scholarships, based on merit and need, to students from the **Solino** neighborhood of Port au Prince – one of the poorest areas of the city marked by endemic poverty. Students attend **Frere Alexandre School**, which has had to relocate its campus, but remains in operation.



Poverty is not the only obstacle **Solino** students face. Food scarcity and high prices add hunger as a barrier. Solino residents long resisted the encroachment and control of armed gangs, but last year the area was taken over by force and scores of houses were burned. Many of the scholarship students are now living in tents or other makeshift “houses”, adding homelessness to their challenges. Still, with **Rich in Mercy** support, 40 students will take the annual, national exams required for either the elementary certificate or secondary diploma. “**Bay chapo**” (“hats off”) to these “odds defying” youth committed to realizing a better future!

## Housing Repair and Reconstruction Increase Dignity and Safety for Vulnerable Families

Since 2016 following the devastation of Haiti’s southern peninsula by hurricane Matthew, **Rich in Mercy** has been helping to repair or rebuild houses for a targeted population of widows, single mothers, and other highly vulnerable families who do not have the resources to make the needed repairs and cannot access other sources of support.



**Sandia Francois** lives with her extended family in **Torbeck** – a rural village along Haiti’s southern peninsula in the area ravaged by hurricane Matthew. The family had lived in the skeleton of a battered house while struggling to provide education for three

siblings and four cousins. A **Rich in Mercy** grant covered the cost of repairing the house, allowing the family to live with increased safety and greater dignity.



Sandia is the first of her family to attend university and is near to completing a degree in accounting. She has helped cover the cost of transportation and tuition through her own efforts by selling “**papita**” (fried plantains).

## Tree-Planting Raises Awareness and Engages Rural Youth in Care for the Environment



Haiti is mainly an agricultural country. More than half the population depends on farming. A national holiday on May 1<sup>st</sup> celebrates **Agriculture and Labor** and pays tribute to the women and men who form the backbone of Haitian society and whose sweat, perseverance, and unshakeable faith in tomorrow shape the Haitian spirit. The holiday is also an occasion to highlight the negative impact of deforestation, to promote environmental awareness, and to help ensure future resources for the community.

In **Ducis** village, students from several schools mobilize to plant trees provided by a **Rich in Mercy** supported nursery in an exercise that fosters responsibility, love for nature, and civic engagement. Both children and adults, with eyes towards the future, immerse their hands in the Haitian soil, and become aware that education isn’t done only with books. Education, the foundation for positive and systemic change for Haiti and countries like it, is also a result of strong actions taken together, concrete gestures made by ordinary people, and whole communities living out deep-rooted traditional values.