



Solidarity News Notes...

News from the Rich in Mercy Institute – Spring 2019

Fuel Crisis, Soaring Inflation, and Alleged Corruption Propel Paralyzing Protests



Successive waves of civil unrest and paralyzing protests – termed “Operation Lockdown” – have flooded Haiti’s capital and major towns over the past nine months and continue to the present. The protests are responding to an unprecedented fuel crisis linked to dependency on oil imports from Venezuela and a soaring rate of inflation that has caused the price of staples like rice, beans, and cooking oil to double. Alleged corruption by the previous and current national governments, resulting in the disappearance of nearly \$4 billion of “Petro Caribe” development funds, has launched an anti-corruption campaign that is a driving force in Operation Lockdown.

The protests are aimed at the government of President Jovenal Moïse but are also challenging the policies of government agencies and global institutions that are killing the population and remain unresponsive to their needs. The development plan for Haiti, based on austerity and privatization and promoted by international organizations, remains in effect despite decades of evidence that its policies mainly benefit the already-rich and despite the growing strength of popular movements against them.

It remains unclear where the country is going, but the recent protests are reminiscent in scale and force of the popular movements of the 1980s that opened a path for democratic government following decades of dictatorship. The protests may very well signal not only disillusionment with the government and international institutions, but with faith in democracy itself.



RiM Grants Enable Odds-Defying Youth to Study Nursing, Electricity, and Diplomacy



Ketura Alexandre, 22, from Les Cayes in the south of Haiti (shown far left), managed to overcome the extreme poverty in which she was born and the odds against women completing high school in Haiti. A Rich in Mercy scholarship based on merit and need enables her to continue defying the odds and to realize her life-long dream of studying nursing so that she can be of “service to her family, her country and anyone she meets along her path in life”!

Belinjina (“Gina”) Gelin, 22, of Fond Parisien (shown left) completed secondary school in spite of her father dying when she was young and her mother being disabled. With help from her grandfather and a half-scholarship from the Université de Technologie (UNITECH) she began studies in diplomacy last year. Following the death of her grandfather a RIM scholarship is enabling her to continue “defying the odds” as the first member of her family to attend university.

Raymond Jean Wilkens, 21, from Les Cayes (right), was orphaned as a baby and raised by his grandmother. With RIM support he is completing studies to become an electrical technician and intends to use his skills to find employment and support his family while continuing to study and save money so that he can eventually realize his dream of attending medical school and becoming a medical doctor devoted to the service of his community!



Emergency School and Medical Fund Grants Advance Fondation Enfant Jesus Mission

The **Fondation Enfant Jesus** (FEJ) is a Haitian non-profit organization with over 30 years of experience empowering local communities and caring for Haiti's most vulnerable children. Its mission is to create sustainable communities in Haiti by offering opportunities in education, improved health-care, and self-sustaining employment.



The **Enfant Jesus Elementary School** is the cornerstone of the family support and community development initiative of FEJ in the region of Lamardelle. The school is a model of academic quality and of innovative child care services. The school enrolls more than 500 children in pre-school through 6th grade, but the academic-year opening was delayed last fall because of a shortfall in external fundraising due to the lingering and terminal illness of the Foundation's visionary leader, **M. Lucien Duncan** who died in September. Thanks to the concerted efforts of the **FEJ-USA board** of directors and a matching grant from the Rich in Mercy Institute "**Education for Change**" fund students and teachers returned to their classrooms in October.

Recognized as a top-tier child welfare institution in Haiti by Institut du Bien-Être Social et de la Recherche (IBESR), the **Crèche Enfant Jesus** is one of two FEJ child-care centers and is located in Obléon, Kenscoff in the mountains of Haiti. The facility is spacious, comfortably accommodating many children and providing the necessary care. It includes recreational areas for toddlers and older children as well as dedicated land for growing nutritious fruits and vegetables and raising small farm animals for consumption. A Rich in Mercy grant, from the "**Meds for Missions**" fund and made at the request of RIM friend **Sue Calkins** from Connecticut, is replenishing a depleted emergency medicine fund for the Crèche. Sue is completing three months as a full-time volunteer at the crèche and plans to return to volunteer with FEJ at the crèche again next year!



RIM Grant Supports Ecological Initiative to Collect and Transform Plastic Garbage.



Visitors to Port au Prince discover a shocking amount of plastic trash that litters the streets, clogs water canals, and overwhelms the capacity of municipal waste removal. A "sea of plastic" covers beaches and lines the shores of rivers and streams. Plastic trash removed from canals is burned in open-air dumps polluting the air and leaving a residue that remains for scores of years before decomposing.

Responding to the challenge of Pope Francis' to "care for our common home", the **Association of the Franciscan Family** in partnership with other religious congregations and sectors of the municipal government have launched an ambitious initiative to transform plastic waste into economically valuable products such as floor tiles, building blocks, and roofing tiles using existing technologies developed by Veiga Maquinas, SA and successfully implemented in Brazil. A modest grant from the **Rich in Mercy Institute** and a major grant from the **Catholic Bishops' Conference of Italy** are funding the first phase of the project.



The Municipality of Port au Prince donated property for the project. It includes a large industrial building on nearly 50,000 sq ft of land. When fully operational the project will ensure direct employment for at least 15 families with more than 30 or 40 additional people earning a living separating and transporting plastic trash from local collection sites including schools, religious communities, dumps and markets. Instilling civic pride and elevating, especially among children, ecological awareness in the "care for our common home" are specific objectives in addition to creating a for-profit industry based on trash transformation!