

Hurricanes create crisis in Haiti

Haiti, and its people, have been pushed to the limit over the past several years by political unrest, environmental degradation and extreme poverty. Now Haiti has been devastated by hurricanes Fay, Gustav and Ike, and by tropical storm Hanna. Fay hit first on August 15, followed in succession by the others ending with Ike on September 7.

While exact numbers of those affected are still not available, it is estimated that as many as 1,000 people may have perished and more than 1,000,000 left homeless. Many children have died and many more have been orphaned by these storms.

Gonaïves, a coastal city in the Artibonite region, was particularly badly hit. Homes were washed away, severe flooding washed out bridges and people were stranded on rooftops for days on end waiting for help.

Food production was severely damaged, especially in the Artibonite region. Rice paddies in the north-western Haitian village of Liancourt were submerged in lake-sized pools of water. In the south, entire groves of plantain trees were wiped out and in the central plateau, fields of beans and cornfields were ruined.

There is little hope for a quick recovery for Haiti. Farmers say all they can do is pray for no more rain. The Haitian government and international agencies are responding to this crisis, but movement of supplies is slow and the scale of the disaster requires a larger and more rapid response.

Even before the storms, Haiti's government was struggling to feed the country's nearly 9 million people. Rioting about food prices toppled the Prime Minister and sparked a worldwide appeal by the United



Nations for aid. The USA shipped \$45million worth of food, which was supposed to last until the end of 2008, but is quickly running out because of the crisis caused by the storms.

The Guardian newspaper quoted Joel Boutroue, the United Nations Development Programme resident representative in Haiti. "We have a good recipe for a disaster that's worse than a humanitarian crisis," said Boutroue who, like others in the international community, is concerned about how long Haitians will battle hunger this time around before a repeat of April's deadly food riots.

According to UN special envoy Hedi Annabi, "The security situation is even more fragile than what it was. Prices will go up, the scarcity of food, all of that could make the security situation more fragile."

Our partner YMCA in Haiti has been keeping us up to date on their situation. Thankfully the YMCA centers in Port-au Prince, Camp Perrin and Ste. Suzanne were not destroyed. The YMCA Youth Leaders have been meeting to analyze the situation and plan actions that will help affected families in neighbouring areas with meals and schooling support for the children.



Youth security in Guatemala

The Government of Canada has donated \$100,000 and deployed relief supplies to over 2,000 families in affected communities. Other countries are also responding to this humanitarian crisis. However, funds are still desperately needed to ensure ongoing food and daily living supplies and for reconstruction efforts which will be carried out beyond the emergency response relief efforts.

If you wish to help Haitians recover from this catastrophe, there are international organizations actively working on the ground to bring aid and relief. The Canadian Red Cross (www.RedCross.ca) has deployed aid workers and urgently-needed relief supplies. UNICEF Canada (www.unicef.ca) is focussing its support and aid to children affected by the disasters and Development and Peace (www.devop.org) is working in Haiti on emergency relief and reconstruction.

Donations to the YMCA of Montreal Foundation, 1435 Drummond, Montreal, Qc, H3G 1W3, can be designated to support the YMCA of Haiti with its efforts to provide immediate and long-term help for children and their families to recover from this disastrous summer.



The ACJ/YMCA of Guatemala works with youth to offer a positive alternative to the legacy of violence and predominance of youth gangs in Guatemalan society. This important work is perceived to be a threat to existing youth gangs, and is believed to be the root cause of the August 10, 2008 murders of three ACJ volunteer youth leaders in Amatitlan.

The YMCA of Greater Montreal, along with YMCA Canada and YMCAs around the world, wrote to officials in Guatemala requesting a thorough investigation of these crimes, and urging Guatemala to promote public policies that respect, protect and defend the lives of young people. Amnesty International has also drawn attention to these particular murders in its request for Urgent Appeals. As a result, representatives from the ACJ of Guatemala were invited to meet with the Minister of the Interior, who has assured them that everything will be done to find and prosecute those responsible.

The reality of violence within Guatemalan society, its impact, and security for ACJ Youth Leaders and participants have become a priority. The ACJ plans to improve the lighting in its Amatitlan program center and the surrounding areas and to repair the ACJ's protective wall. The ACJ will meet with the authorities responsible for security in the municipality to communicate the mission of YMCA Guatemala's work with youth, and to seek support for a prevention program.

The World Alliance of YMCAs has launched an appeal for support for the ACJ of Guatemala's response in the aftermath of these brutal killings. Funds are being collected for the ACJ to provide psychological support for the families of the victims and for the other Youth Leaders. The ACJ will also provide some financial support to the families affected by this tragedy. The YMCA of Greater Montreal has contributed \$1,000 to this fundraising cause.

Anyone wishing to make a donation for the ACJ of Guatemala's work can send a cheque to the YMCA of Montreal Foundation, 1435 Drummond, Montreal, Qc, H3G 1W3, designated "for ACJ of Guatemala".