

28 March 2024—Dr. Marie Lémy’s statement

The plight of Haiti and the remedy suggested

Considering the current chaos in Haiti, with armed gangs causing death and desolation in all sectors of society, being in control of 80% of Port-au-Prince, the capital, according to a United Nations report, the question being asked is *“How did Haiti get to be that way?”*

From being the first Black Republic in the world, known as the “Pearl of the Antilles” in slavery days, the second independent nation in the Western Hemisphere, second only to the United States of America, now it has a debasing moniker: “The poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere,” one of the poorest in the world.

The intergenerational impact of White supremacist colonialism and hegemony of systemic racism is clearly highlighted in the Durban Declaration and Plan of Action (DDPA) 2001. Haiti is suffering the effects of the punishment heaped upon it for the “effrontery” of our ancestors, who changed the course of history by defeating the mighty army of Napoléon Bonaparte, at the *Battle of Vertières*, on November 18, 1803, to declare independence on January 1, 1804. Thus did it become the beacon of freedom for enslaved Blacks everywhere. (By the way, the word *Vertières* was banned from French dictionary and regular vocabulary, until 2019, after Dany Laferrière, a son of Haiti, now Canadian citizen, was inducted in the *Académie Française* (French Academy that regulates the French language). He convinced his colleagues that *Vertières* belongs in the French dictionary.

The Haitian revolution greatly disrupted Western economy, then based on the exploitation of Black slaves everywhere. Formerly enslaved Haitians were not compensated for their labor, and/or the atrocities against their persons, and the isolation of the new nation began with an international embargo declared against it beginning in 1806. That cut Haiti from commerce with the rest of the world. In 1825, King Charles X of France, supported by other enslaving nations, including the United States, at gunpoint, declared that Haiti owed reparations to the French citizens who had lost property due to the slave uprising. A debt of 150 million francs was imposed on the country. Reduced later to 90 million, the last penny was paid in 1947.

Based on a series of articles in the New York Times, in May 2022, the “double debt” of independence imposed on Haiti amounted to more than \$21 billion in current dollars. It’s referred to as “double debt,” because the Haitian government, unable to find the money at the beginning, had to take loans from a French bank to begin the payments. That mortgaged the country’s finances, leaving it penniless to undertake any development program, a situation that led to the impoverishment of the country from the beginning.

The United States also is responsible for impoverishing Haiti. On December 17, 1914, before the 19-year occupation of the country that began in July 1915, a detachment of U.S. Marines landed in Port-au-Prince and went directly to Haiti’s National Bank, to grab the country’s gold reserves

of \$500,000, ostensibly for safekeeping in Wall Street. That money was never returned. And in 2022, it was calculated to amount to \$13 billion.

Those predatory actions against Haiti, which had helped in the liberation of several Latin American countries, by Simon Bolivar, have hampered the development of Haiti until this day and have left young men, uneducated and idle, whilst women and girls remain susceptible to gender based violence and exploitation. Moreover, Haiti has become a headache for its neighbors in the Caribbean, even for the United States, with a constant flow of refugees, in search of safety and financial wellbeing.

Haiti therefore needs to be “repaired” to retain its citizens at home. In that regard, the **Abuja Proclamation 1993** articulates a convincing argument for reparatory justice that is well grounded in international law, based on empirical evidence of historical and contemporary human rights violations that oppress people of African descent. Thus, a **Reparations Program** to Haiti must be enacted by former colonizers and others who impoverished the nation, to provide compensation for Haitians who have suffered from widespread historical and contemporary human rights abuse and armed violence. That **Reparations Fund** should be under the control of a mixed board of international members, plus honest and competent Haitians, who will undertake development projects for the country, thus keeping our youth busy and our citizens at home. This must be in accordance with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the United Nations Agenda towards transformative change for racial justice and equality (A/HRC/47/53), ensuring inclusive participation of all Haitians.

We don't suggest turning the billions of dollars to the kind of government in power in Haiti now. For, too often, Haitian political leaders have proven themselves devoid of what it takes for good governance, engrossed as they are in corruption and benefitting from impunity. It is therefore imperative that any new administration in Haiti, enforces domestic legislation that provides reparatory justice for Haitians, as well as promote and protect universal human rights in accordance with the DDPA 2001 and international human rights law.