

From scandal to scandal in Haiti — Ten years after the deadly 2010 earthquake

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Contents

- [Embezzlement](#)
- [Only one captain on the ship](#)

On 12 January 2010 a powerful earthquake devastated the metropolitan area of Port-au-Prince, the capital of Haiti. The buildings were often badly made, with poor quality cement. About 250,000 people were killed (one person in ten) and hundreds of thousands were injured or missing. Since then, the damaged houses have hardly been repaired and new homes have been built in the same way as they were before the earthquake, without taking into account anti-seismic standards.

Embezzlement

For the past ten years, Haiti has been living at the rhythm of scandals. A scandal of international aid which, apparently, was supposed to “rebuild Haiti”. Initially, it did help save lives and limit the disaster. But the placing of Haiti under (de facto) supervision in the name of “reconstruction” led to a fiasco and weakened the Haitian state.

For example, the reconstruction of the main public hospital, entrusted to a Spanish firm, has been at a standstill for 7 months. According to the French embassy, the maternity hospital has been “renovated” with the help of Paris and Washington; however the deliveries are often done by the light of the midwives’ telephone.

Then there was the scandal of the Blue Helmets, the UN peacekeepers who introduced cholera in Haiti and multiplied rapes and sexual abuses. There was also the outrage of foreign powers (including France) who rigged the elections in order to make the singer Michel Martelly, who had pledged his allegiance to them, the head of state in 2011.

This was followed by repeated scandals during Martelly’s presidency, when he and his family were involved in corruption, embezzlement and cocaine trafficking. There were Incidents involving the Petrocaribe Fund, which was financed by loans granted by Venezuela from the sale of oil. Among those who squandered this fund was Jovenel Moïse, who later became president of the Republic (in 2017). Three companies took part in his embezzlement. Two of them, with the same tax number, each received hundreds of thousands of dollars to do the same job. Meanwhile, living or survival conditions have worsened for everyone except for a small elite. But successive scandals have exposed a system that has become unacceptable to large segments of society.

Only one captain on the ship

From the summer of 2018, protests became widespread. Riots, massive demonstrations, roadblocks and barricades paralysed the country on several occasions. In recent years, activists and left-wing organisations have been trying to act in unison and have managed to play a significant role. On the whole, however, it is bourgeois politicians (including notorious criminals) and populist sectors that are setting the agenda of the protests. Most of them only want the departure of President Moses and not profound changes. The deprived population is therefore for them only a source of leverage.

Jovenel Moïse was not abandoned by foreign powers and saved his post. No longer able to benefit from the help of the Blue Helmets (who left in 2017), he relies on armed gangs, which have perpetrated several massacres. Presenting himself as Mr. Clean, he says he wants to wrest the predatory state from the oligarchs, but of course, he only targets those who demand his departure.

On 22 December, he announced that some people “risk being victims of accidents if they ever cross his path.” The term of office for MPs and some Senators expired on 12 January. Jovenel Moïse, who has done nothing to ensure that elections are held, published a tweet in which he said that “Parliament has lapsed. Far from regretting it, he spoke of a “historic opportunity”. This is more than worrisome!

Arthur Mahon, 22 January 2020

P.S.

• Translation IVP. Sunday 2 February 2020:
<http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article6387>