

# The Earthquake Disaster in Haiti

15 MONTHS LATER

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4/11/11

# WHAT'S A DISASTER ?

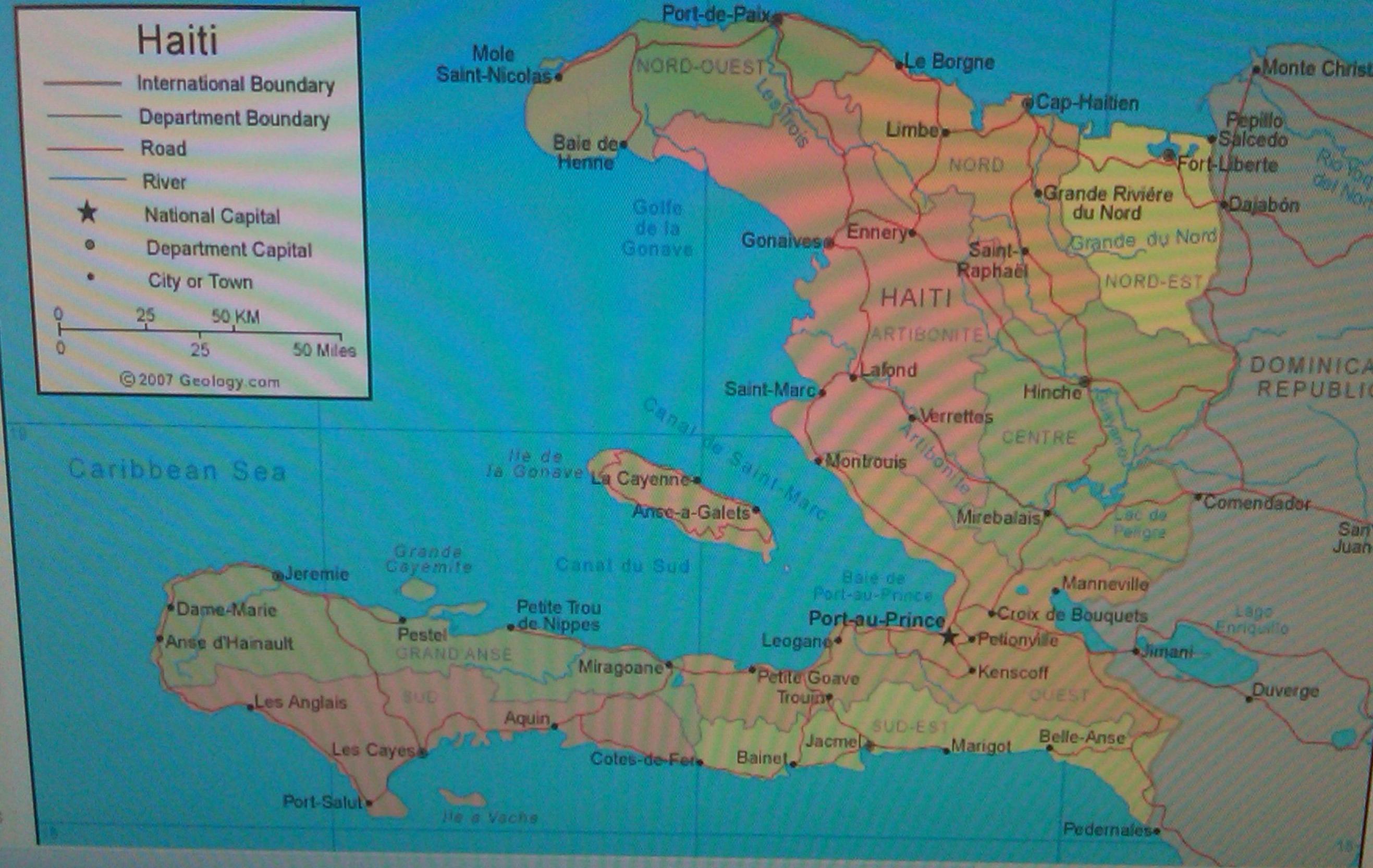
- In 1992, the U.N. defined disaster as “a serious disruption of a society, causing widespread human, material, and environmental losses, which exceed the capacity of the affected society to cope, using only its own resources”.

# Haiti

- International Boundary
- Department Boundary
- Road
- River
- ★ National Capital
- Department Capital
- City or Town

0 25 50 KM  
0 25 50 Miles

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# A HAITIAN DISASTER ?

- Haiti has dealt with disasters for centuries. They have been man-made or natural
- From slavery to the war of independence(1804)
- Dictatorships and “coup d’etats”
- Civil wars, gang violence (kidnappings)
- Hurricanes and floods
- The January 12, 2010 earthquake
- Then..., cholera epidemic

# The Earthquake Human Toll

UN report : “Haiti Revised Humanitarian Appeal 2010”, published Feb 15, 2010 by (CAP) Consolidated Appeals Process :

- Killed : 217,366
- Wounded : 300,572
- Missing : 383
- In spontaneous settlements : 1,237,032
- Displaced outside Port-au-Prince :  
511,405





  
**SOGEBANK**

Entrée  
**SOGEBANK**  
Delmas 30



Ecole Primaire Mixte  
LA RECTITUDE

LES  
INSCRIPTIONS  
SONT REÇUES  
CHAQUE JOUR

19



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# How did Haitians react ?

- Resilience, resignation, grief
- Faith, destiny ?
- Scientific and conspiracy theories ?
- Anxiety, depression
- Alcohol and psychosis
- Complications of preexisting psychiatric problems

# In the Diaspora ?

- Guilt, helplessness
- Anger, worries
- Psychosomatic symptoms
- Grief, depression, anxiety
- Suicidal ideation and behavior
- Substance abuse
- Worsening of existing problems

# Crisis Situation

- Crisis is a perception or experiencing of an event or situation as an intolerable difficulty that exceeds the person's current resources and coping mechanisms
- 4 types of crisis : developmental, situational, existential, and ECOSYSTEMIC
- People react to crisis in one of 3 ways: 1) they grow stronger; or 2) they block it from awareness, only to be for ever haunted by it; or 3) they break down...

# The earthquake: ecosystemic crisis

All 5 ecological components of the Haitian society have been affected by the earthquake:

- 1- Microsystem: the individual's immediate environment is destroyed
- 2- Mesosystem: communications collapsed
- 3- Exosystem: already inadequate infrastructure seriously damaged
- 4- Macrosystem: government is paralyzed; the national psyche is shaken up
- 5- Chronosystem: the time factor. How does it affect the crisis ?

# Chronosystemic perspective

- TIME has been a critical variable in post-earthquake Haiti:
- 1- Impact: (first minutes and hours), fear, shock, denial, self-protection, food and shelter, communication?
- 2- Emergency/acute heroic phase: first hours and days, save others, property, control of situation?, high energy, low efficiency?, people anxious to talk about the event
- 3- Inventory phase: first days, information about loved ones, homes, job place, frustration, anger

# Chronosystem of a crisis event

- 4- Honeymoon phase (up to 3 or 4 months): “we are in this together” attitude, optimism, media coverage, political attention, financial support, hope for rebuilding
- 5- Avoidance phase (1 month...): ASD > PTSD, people stop talking about the event but images and thoughts continue to predominate cognitive functioning
- 6- Adaptation phase (weeks to months): resiliency and/or effective crisis intervention lead to recovery, people thrive, grow, and move on
- 7- Disillusionment phase (soon within the first year): media and politicians go home, red tape slows recovery, people are exhausted, public health problems arise, depression and suicide, infections, cholera, more deaths: **SECOND DISASTER**

# FIRST ANNIVERSARY

- After One Year :
- “Pathogenic” shift (Antonovsky, 1991) : debilitating state that becomes chronic, bringing on a host of physical and psychological illnesses
- “Salutogenic” shift : people have met the challenge the traumatic event posed for them and are able to move on with their lives
- In Haiti, decision about rebuilding one’s life in the same environment or move on to a different place
- Restabilizing one’s emotional and social self
- Local leaders ??? should be involved with international help, rebuilding the infrastructure, helping the victims, the displaced, and tackle the “second disaster” ???

  
**MOSAIQUES  
GARDERE SA**

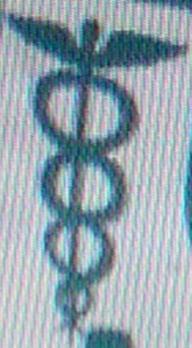
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# What's being done now ?

- Haitian Mental Health Summit : June 26, 27, 2010, at the University of Miami
- APA (BPS, IPS) – NYU/Global Mental Health – SUNY Downstate – HAPA – World Psychiatric Congress
- BPA and Association of Black Psychologists
- Haiti Ministry of Health and Mental Health Practitioners in Haiti
- “Rebati Mental Health” Task Force
- Partners in Health / Zanmi LaSante
- Mars & Kline, and Pont Beudet Hospitals
- Plans for on-going training, service provision, support



# What about the international volunteers and relief workers?

- “When someone has lost everything, asking them how they are doing is futile”.
- Food, water, clothing, basic needs...
- The deceased, the injured, the children, the handicapped, the elderly...
- Then looting, rapes, total loss of privacy, amputations, infections, more deaths...
- How, where do you sleep, rest, wash up, eat; are you scared, stressed, and burned out
- “Crisis work is more about perspiration than inspiration”
- After the initial rush of enthusiasm, zeal, and unbridled energy, there is a lot of sweat, tears, and agony

# Some do's for disaster relief workers

- Work in teams
- Take time off to sleep and decompress
- Have plenty of water and food
- Clear chain of command with clear role and function statements
- Different teams debrief each other
- Debriefing is held away from the crisis scene
- Be in good physical and mental health
- Help without interfering or making assumptions

# What have we learned ?

- In a poor country like Haiti, social pathology, inadequate infrastructure, physical & mental health problems, all will invite cycles of disaster with intertwined human and natural causes
- International effort must understand the different culture, a special history, politics, language, and religion
- The Haitian survivor must be allowed to process feelings in line with his/her religious interpretation of events, without any judgment being passed on the merit of those beliefs
- 9/11, Katrina, Tsunami, Oklahoma, Columbine, Tokyo, Madrid, Haiti, Israel, Australia, South Africa, Sudan, all these “disasters” tell us that large-scale crisis and chaos will keep happening ...(role of the NGO’s). JAPAN !!!

# The future of Mental Health in Haiti

- The Haitian Government, with the help of NGO's and "Rebati Mental Health" Task Force, must develop a long term national mental health policy
- The earthquake has offered one opportunity : we will not think only about responses to crisis. "Systems, sustainability, and strategy" must become the focus
- History, culture, and language demand that only the leadership and long term commitment of Haitian born professionals will insure the rebuilding (rebati) of a mental health infrastructure in the country.

# References

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