

Deadly Flooding Hits Haiti's North: President Martelly Uses Tragedy to Campaign

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Torrential rains pummeled Haiti's North for over five days last week, from Oct. 31 to Nov. 4, causing flooding that killed over a dozen people and affected some 6,000 more.

Many agricultural fields were completely destroyed, and livestock was swept away by the raging waters.

The most impacted towns were Limbé, Limonade, Dondon, Le Borgne, and St. Raphael. In the city of Cap-Haïtien, hard-hit were the neighborhoods of Saint Suzane, Cité du Peuple, and Chada. The runway of Cap-Haïtien's newly renovated airport was also flooded, and planes could not land there for several days.

According to experts, much of the flooding resulted from clogged drains and canals, which have not been properly maintained over the past three years despite government officials spending hundreds of millions of dollars on touristic and industrial development in the North.

Mountains in the North are also largely deforested for the making of *charbon*, the charcoal used for fuel in Haiti's cities. Water rushes down the denuded mountains right into the streets of Cap Haïtien.

Meanwhile, most victims are left to fend for themselves. Local authorities complain that they haven't the means at their disposal for rapid emergency response. The central government has been in no hurry to assist victims who have no food, drinking water, change of clothes, bedding, or milk for their children, among other things. The homes and possessions of many flood victims were swept away by the water that was up to three meters deep.

"All of our belongings are under water," said one flood victim. "We are not able to save anything. Our important documents, the uniforms of our children are submerged under water. Nobody has given us any support."

On Nov. 5, in the popular neighborhood of Samari, a 9-year old child died of hunger in a shelter.

"The state no longer exists in Cap-Haïtien," said one resident in response to the tragedy. "This is the first time the population of Haiti's second largest city has been so held in contempt and neglected in this manner by the authorities."

Only after the flooding did government authorities arrive on the scene. During a ministerial meeting, Prime Minister Laurent Lamothe announced the release of 34 million gourdes

(US\$742,450) for flood victims, but that money has taken time to reach them.

“Everything is concentrated in Port-au-Prince,” said Martin Pierre, the government’s chargé de mission in the North. “Everything comes out of Port-au-Prince. There is no food for the victims in shelters.”

According to disaster workers on the scene, President Martelly has used the flooding tragedy to promote his new party, the Haitian Bald Headed Party (PHTK). On five pound bags of rice being distributed to victims, the PHTK logo is affixed. PHTK banners are hung in food distribution areas, and some disaster workers have been given PHTK T-shirts to wear. Many victims have denounced Martelly taking advantage of this tragedy to make election propaganda.

“We need clothes, beds, and bedspreads in the shelters,” said one victim. “We need them to disinfect our homes so we can go home and not catch infectious diseases.”

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