

France Must Repay Historic Debt to Haiti!

An open letter to French President Nicolas Sarkozy

By [Global Research](#)

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Below is an English translation of an open letter to the French government published in the August 16 French daily *Libération*, concerning the \$21-billion (current dollar equivalent) extorted by France from Haiti from 1825 to 1944.

This was the “independence debt” that France imposed on Haiti as a condition for diplomatic and trade relations, under threat of military intervention. Haiti won its national independence in 1804 from the slave/colonial empire of France. It was quickly embargoed and otherwise isolated by the empires of the day, including France, Britain and Spain, and by the new, rising power on the scene, the United States.

A story on the open letter appears in UK daily [The Guardian on August 16](#).

The open letter follows a successful international media exposé of France’s historic extortion. On July 14, 2010, activists in several countries inspired by the “Yes Men” comedy/political duo and calling themselves the Committee for the Reimbursement of the Indemnity Money Extorted from Haiti (CRIME) [issued a fake announcement](#) that France would finally pay its historic debt. France was forced to deny that it was doing any such thing, and threatened legal action against the activists. The action brought media attention, reminding journalists and the public of the historical context behind Haiti’s immiseration.

Hackers Clone French Government Website



The exposé, summarized well in [a July 16 article in the UK daily The Independent](#), helped to explain the long history of extortion, betrayal and structural injustice that left Haiti so impoverished and vulnerable to devastation by the earthquake that claimed over a quarter of a million lives on January 12, 2010. July 14 is [Bastille Day](#), the date of the 1789 proclamation of France as a republic.

In 2003, the elected government of Haiti headed by President Jean-Bertrand Aristide initiated legal action at the World Court in The Hague to recover the estimated \$21-billion extorted from Haiti. That action was dropped by the human rights violating regime that took power in Haiti following February 29, 2004. President Aristide and the other institutions of elected government were overthrown on that date by Haitian paramilitaries with military and political assistance from the United States, France and Canada. That foreign military intervention was, in turn, endorsed by the UN Security Council.

To read the original French version of the August 16 open letter, go to this website:

Repay historic debt to Haiti:

An open letter to French President Nicolas Sarkozy

The French government has indicated that it is pursuing possible legal action against the Committee for the Reimbursement of the Indemnity Money Extorted from Haiti (CRIME) over a Yes Men-inspired announcement last Bastille Day pledging that France would pay Haiti restitution.

We believe the ideals of equality, fraternity and liberty would be far better served if, instead of pouring public resources into the prosecution of these pranksters, France were to start paying Haiti back for the 90 million gold francs that were extorted following Haitian independence.

This “independence debt,” which is today valued at well over the 17 billion euros pledged in the fake announcement last July 14, illegitimately forced a people who had won their independence in a successful slave revolt, to pay again for their freedom. Imposed under threat of military invasion and the restoration of slavery by French King Charles X, to compensate former colonial slave-owners for lost “property” (including the slaves who had won their freedom and independence when they defeated Napoleon’s armies), this indemnity burdened generations of Haitians with an illegitimate debt, which they were still paying right up until 1947.

France is not the only country that owes a debt to Haiti. After 1947, Haiti incurred debt to commercial banks and international financial institutions under the Duvalier dictatorships, who stole billions from the public treasury. The basic needs and development aspirations of generations of Haitians were sacrificed to pay back these debts. Granting Haiti the status of Highly Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) and canceling part of the current debt only begins to reverse the financial damage done by these recent debts.

More recently, in 2000, Inter-American Development Bank loans of \$150-million for basic infrastructure were illegally blocked by the U.S. government as a means of political pressure. This also did measurable economic and human damage. Each of these institutions and governments should be responsible for the harm they did to Haiti’s society and economy.

In 2003, when the Haitian government demanded repayment of the money France had extorted from Haiti, the French government responded by helping to overthrow that government. Today, the French government responds to the same demand by CRIME by threatening legal action. These are inappropriate responses to a demand that is morally, economically, and legally unassailable. In light of the urgent financial need in the country in the wake of the devastating earthquake of January 12, 2010, we urge you to pay Haiti, the world’s first black republic, the restitution it is due.

Signatories

- Tariq Ali, author

- Gilbert Achcar, author
- Pierre Alferi, author
- Jean-Claude Amara, spokesperson, Droits devant!! (Rights First)
- Kevin B Anderson, University of California at Santa Barbara
- Roger Annis, Haiti Solidarity B.C.
- Anthony Arnone, author and editor, Haymarket Books
- Alain Badiou, Professor, European Graduate School
- Étienne Balibar, emeritus professor of philosophy, Paris-Nanterre
- Nnimmo Bassey, Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth-Nigeria
- Rosalyn Baxandall, Prof Emeritus, Distinguished Teaching Prof. SUNY Old Westbury. adjunct CUNY Labor School
- Pierre Beaudet, founder, Alternatives
- Dan Beeton, Center for Economic and Policy Research
- Walden Bello, member of the Philippine House of Representatives
- Medea Benjamin, Code Pink
- Andy Bichlbaum & Mike Bonnano, the “Yes Men”
- Serge Bouchereau, Résistance Haïtienne au Québec (Haitian Resistance in Quebec)
- Myriam Bourgy, CADTM International (Comité pour l’Annulation de la Dette du Tiers Monde)
- Houria Bouteldja, Indigènes de la République (the Republic’s Natives)
- José Bové, member of the European parliament, Europe Ecologie
- Leslie Cagan, co-founder, United for Peace and Justice
- Aldrin Calixte, Friends of the Earth-Haïti

- Ellen Cantarow, journalist
- Camille Chalmers, State University of Haiti & PAPDA (Haitian Platform to Advocate Alternative Development)
- CEDETIM (Center for international solidarity research and initiatives)
- Noam Chomsky, Massachusetts Institute of Technology
- Jeff Cohen, author & media critic
- Jim Cohen, Dept. of Political Science, Paris VIII
- Daniel Cohn-Bendit, member of European Parliament, Europe Ecology, co-president of the Greens-Europe Free Alliance
- Brian Concannon, Institute for Justice & Democracy In Haiti
- Raphaël Confiant, author
- Mike Davis, author & scholar, University of California Riverside
- Warren Davis, Solidarity Co-Chair, Philadelphia Jobs with Justice
- Nick Dearden, Jubilee Debt Campaign UK
- Rokhaya Diallo, activist, Les indivisibles (the Indivisible)
- Christine Delphy, sociology professor
- Rea Dol, director of the Port-au-Prince school SPUDEP
- Ariel Dorfman, Duke University
- Stephen Duncombe, New York University
- Berthony Dupont, Haïti Liberté
- Ben Ehrenreich, author
- Joe Emersberger, MediaLens
- Yves Engler, author
- Eric Fassin, sociologist, Ecole Normale Supérieure

- Dianne Feeley, editor, *Against the Current*
- John Feffer, co-director, *Foreign Policy In Focus*
- Anthony Fenton, journalist and researcher
- Bill Fletcher, Jr., *BlackCommentator.com*
- Eduardo Galeano, author
- Grazia Ietto-Gillies, UNCTAD & London South Bank University
- Greg Grandin, history professor, New York University
- Arun Gupta, editor, *The Independent*
- Peter Hallward, philosophy professor, Kingston University
- Hamé, rapper, *La Rumeur*
- Stuart Hammond, Canada Haiti Action Network
- Thomas Harrison, co-director, Campaign for Peace and Democracy
- Helene Hazera, producer with France Culture radio
- John Hilary, executive director, War on Want
- HK, musician, *Hk & les saltimbanks*
- Kim Ives, *Haïti Liberté*
- Olatunde Johnson, director, Friends of the Earth-Sierra Leone
- Eva Joly, member of European parliament, president of the European parliament's Development Commission
- Mario Joseph, BAI (Office of International Lawyers, Port-au-Prince)
- Mathieu Kassovitz, film director
- Robin D. G. Kelley, author and scholar, University of Southern California
- Richard Kim, editor, *The Nation*

- Amir Khadir, Québec Solidaire, representative in the National Assembly of Québec
- Sadri Khiari, mouvement des Indigènes de la République (MIR)
- Naomi Klein, author & journalist
- Pierre Labossiere, Haiti Action
- Fanfan Latour, Haiti Liberté
- Charles Laurence, journalist and author
- Reed Lindsay, journalist
- Pauline Londeix, ACT UP-Paris
- Isabel Macdonald, journalist and media critic
- Christian Mahieux, national secretary of the Union Syndicaliste Solidaires (the Solidarity Syndicalist Union)
- Henri Maler, scholar
- Noël Mamère, representative in the French national assembly
- Jerome Martin, ACT-UP Paris
- John G. Mason, William Paterson University of NJ
- Gustave Massiah, founding member of AITEC-IPAM (International association of Technicians, Experts and Researchers—Initiatives for Another World)
- Georgina Murray, sociology professor, Griffith University
- Cyril Mychalejko, Upside Down World
- Robert Naiman, analyst, Just Foreign Policy
- Jan Nederveen Pieterse, University of California at Santa Barbara
- Bernard Noël, poet
- Derrick O’Keefe, writer and co-chair Canadian Peace Alliance

- Karen Orenstein, Friends of the Earth-U.S.
- Rosalind Petchesky, Distinguished Professor of Political Science, Hunter College & the Graduate Center, City University of New York
- Wadner Pierre, Inter Press Service
- Kevin Pina, Haiti Information Project
- Justin Podur, environmental studies professor, York University
- Serge Quadruppani, author
- Adam Ramsay, No Shock Doctrine for Haiti
- Jacques Rancière, philosophy professor, Paris VIII
- Judy Rebick, author and founder of Rabble.ca
- William I. Robinson, University of California Santa Barbara
- Pierre Rousset, ESSF (Europe Solidarity Without Borders)
- Bobbi Siegelbaum, Health Educator
- Steve Siegelbaum, Founder The Computer School, NYC
- Fanny Simon, Aitec-IPAM (International association of Technicians, Experts and Researchers—Initiatives for Another World)
- Eyal Sivan, film director
- Ashley Smith, writer and Haiti solidarity activist
- Jeb Sprague, University of California Santa Barbara
- Jerome Jerome Thorel, Big Brother Awards France
- Louis-Georges Tin, CRAN (Conseil Représentatif des Associations Noires)
- Steve Weissman, journalist
- Cornel West, Princeton University
- Howard Winant, sociologist and race theorist, University of California-Santa

Barbara

- Cécile Winter, doctor, Collectif Politique Sida en Afrique
- Lawrence Wittner, State University of New York Albany
- Marie Yared, Advocacy Manager, World-Vision France •

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