

U.S. Takeover of Haiti: The centerpieces of the US, UN, and World Bank Plan for Haiti are Sweatshops and Tourism

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When this article appears on the morning of March 31, the much ballyhooed “International Donors Conference Towards a New Future for Haiti” will be getting underway at UN Headquarters in Manhattan.

While demonstrators in the street outside protest the continuing US and UN military occupation of Haiti, now over six years old, and the Haitian people’s exclusion from deliberations on the country’s reconstruction, dignitaries inside like UN Special Envoy to Haiti Bill Clinton, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, and Haitian President René Préval will unveil a plan with lots of pomp and ceremony but which boils down to just one thing: Washington’s take-over of the “new” Haiti.

Hyperbole? Unfortunately, no. The lead editorial in Sunday’s New York Times, which generally articulates the thinking of the US power elite, lays it out clearly: “The plan envisions a multidonor trust fund *managed by the World Bank* that pools money for big projects and avoids wasteful redundancy. The Haitian Development Authority would *approve* the projects; outside auditors would *oversee* the spending.” (Our emphasis added.)

Translation: the World Bank, not Haiti, will run the show, a council of foreigners (with a sprinkling of token Haitians) will rubberstamp directives, and other foreign overseers will supervise the Haitians carrying out the directives.

Although lots of international “friends of Haiti” will be involved in this circus, Washington is the ringleader, using handmaidens like Canada and the Dominican Republic. The meetings to prepare the ground for Mar. 31 were held in Montreal on Jan.25 and Santo Domingo on Mar. 15-17.

Préval has generally implemented Washington’s austerity and privatization dictates, making him a US darling and the Haitian people’s bogeyman. However, after the quake, he and his prime-minister made some imprudent complaints about being sidelined while the US and NGOs ham-fistedly directed relief and reconstruction efforts. Washington put him back in his place by calling him corrupt, a charge Préval called “arrogant.” Despite such outbursts, Préval appears to be behaving again but still promoting the fiction that he’s deciding things.

“Haiti is an independent government, an independent country and the government must say what must be done,” he told Al Jazeera in a Mar. 29 interview when asked who was in charge in Haiti. “But the government doesn’t have the financial means to do it. So we will

have to speak to the donors so that they make available the funds for the government to do what it desires to do.” As for the foreign experts which will dominate in the Haitian Development Authority, he explains that “a lot of our professionals are dead” and “we are leaning on the NGOs to help us to do what we need to do right now.”

The centerpieces of the US, UN, and World Bank plan for Haiti are sweatshops and tourism. Of course there is lip-service paid to the concerns raised by Haitians about revitalizing agriculture and making the country self-sufficient in food again after 25 years of neo-liberal deconstruction. “Decentralization” is another key theme, but, done a certain way, this can also weaken and circumvent Haiti’s central government, which Washington has sought to do since the Haitian people elected President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in 1990.

“Raising money for Haiti is all well and good. But which Haiti is getting the money?” asked Vijay Prashad, Director of International Studies at Trinity College in Hartford, CT. “Is the Haiti of structural adjustment, the raft on the Caribbean, fated to being reduced to a factory and a port for Royal Caribbean’s cruise ships? All the efforts thus far seem to suggest that this is the Haiti that is being promised.”

In articles, radio shows, conferences, demonstrations and graffiti, the Haitian people have made their opposition to this plan known but “Haitian civil society has been completely bypassed in decision-making regarding the post-earthquake reconstruction process,” wrote Bev Bell of the economic justice group Other Worlds earlier this month. “The Haiti government’s Post-Disaster Needs Assessment, launched February 18, granted one week, March 14-20, for ‘consultation with civil society and the private sector,’ according to the terms of reference. However, the government [had] to approve the draft plan on March 15. Furthermore, the government has failed to invoke even the token discussions, not consulting civil society in any way except informally with some businesspeople and several non-governmental organizations who do not speak for citizens.”

Therefore the “new” Haiti being drawn up at the conference will look very much like the old. “Expect more of the same when the Haitian elites and their lobbyists get their reconstruction plans approved,” wrote Olofson hotelier and musician Richard Morse in the Huffington Post. “Bill Clinton isn’t bringing hope to Haiti. Bill Clinton isn’t bringing change to Haiti. Bill Clinton, along with USAID, the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank and the United Nations are bringing more of the same to Haiti: more for the few and less for the many.”

There are more than strings attached to Clinton’s plan for Haiti. There are chains. Haiti would be yoked to an already sinking U.S. economy by dependency on assembling imported U.S. clothing and electronics for pennies an hour, or scrambling against neighbors to attract U.S. tourists.

But it doesn’t have to be this way. Two South American alliances have offered Haiti substantial aid based on solidarity and common interests, not chains of debt and dependency.

ALBA, the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America, is an alliance of eight Latin American and Caribbean nations comprising Venezuela, Cuba, Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Dominica, St. Vincent and Grenadines, and Antigua and Barbuda. On Jan. 25, when the U.S.-led coalition held its Montreal meeting to just plan another meeting, ALBA held an

extraordinary session which came with concrete, immediate aid of food, fuel, electricity, medicine and a \$120 million Humanitarian Fund. ALBA expressed “concern over the excessive presence of foreign military forces in Haiti, with no justifying reasons and without precision about their authority, purposes, responsibilities, and length of stay, which threatens to further complicate the conditions on the ground and the realization of international cooperation.” The ALBA nations also recognized that “efforts to rebuild Haiti must have the people and government of that country as the principal protagonists.”

There is also the Union of South American Nations or UNASUR, which includes all the nations of the South American continent except French Guiana. In February, it offered Haiti \$300 million in cash and money it would borrow on Haiti’s behalf.

One might respond that no South-South cooperation can come up with the \$34.4 billion some estimate Haiti needs to rebuild over the next 10 years. But how are such staggering figures arrived at? These estimates assume the costs to be charged by Halliburton, Dyncorp, or one of the Haitian elite’s construction companies. But we have seen tens of thousands of ordinary Haitians digging themselves out and rebuilding their homes, motivated not by profit but by compassion, solidarity and common interest. This giant army could be harnessed and supported with solidarity from Cuba, Venezuela and ALBA, which are already helping with giant contributions of doctors and fuel.

Progressive Haitian and Dominican groups meeting in Santo Domingo on Mar. 17 concluded that a definitive “break” with the current international system is necessary for Haiti to recover. “We must break with economic dependency,” they wrote in a declaration. “We need to build an economic model that encourages national production by focusing on agriculture, livestock, and agro-industry aimed at meeting our own food needs (cereals, tubers, milk, fruit, fish, meats, etc.).”

An anecdote captures the flavor and the essence of the UN Donors Conference. On March 30, the night before the big day, there was an invitation-only special event for about 200 US and UN officials, bankers, CEOs and NGO bigwigs at the United Nations Library. The sponsors of the event: the UN, the Haitian Government, the Inter-American Development Bank, and.... Coca-Cola. The name of the event was “Haiti Hope Project.” If you like the ring of that name, don’t get any thoughts about borrowing it. Coca-Cola is seeking trademark protection for the slogan, which it plans to put on “ready to eat food bars made primarily of oats.”

Kim Ives is the editor of Haiti Liberté. This article is from [Haïti Liberté](#) , published in Port au Prince and Brooklyn.

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