

# **Sustaining Peace in War-Torn Societies: Lessons from the Haitian Experience**

By Chetan Kumar, United Nations

## **I. I. Introduction**

The US-led intervention in Haiti has often been held up as an example of how not to conduct foreign policy. Ill-defined and open-ended interventions in affairs of other countries for reasons tangential to national security are seen as primarily squandering US military resources and readiness on dubious results and outcomes that only generate more ill-will among those targeted for intervention. Furthermore, to the extent that problems in these countries may have been decades or centuries in the making, they are seen as only being fixed through the “n”-word—nation-building—whereby expensive ventures are undertaken to rebuild entire polities or economies. For many contemporary experts, such nation-building is at best misplaced hubris, at worst sheer folly.

This paper uses the example of Haiti to propose that efforts to build peace in war-torn societies need not be endlessly expensive or open-ended, and if conducted with precision and moderation, can lead to the achievement of key long-term US foreign goals without undermining short-term priorities. This argument is presented from the prism of Haiti’s historical and current experience.

## **II. The History of Conflict in Haiti**

Haiti’s history has conferred upon it a number of significant and unique disadvantages that have prevented the emergence of a stable polity or economy. Conversely, some of its unique characteristics, if adequately emphasized by its friends and neighbors, could also form the basis for lasting peace within its borders.

Named by its first president—Dessalines—from “ayti,” the Taino Indian word for “mountainous lands,” Haiti was born with a strong sense of egalitarian nationhood. Its founders overthrew their masters and created an independent republic, the second independent nation in the Western hemisphere. While the majority of this republic’s citizens were formally Catholics, their popular religion—*voudou* (a blend of African animism, Catholicism, and everyday responses to the exigencies of slavery)—came to define perceptions of the mystical and the supernatural throughout the world. For a country of its small size (its population of six million is less than that of each of the world’s twenty biggest cities), Haiti developed a formidable presence on the global cultural stage, with its unique Creole culture, cuisine, music and art forming a staple for *connoisseurs* around the world. It remained one of the few countries in the

hemisphere to have had both a woman president and a woman prime minister. And its poets and writers repeatedly contributed to the evolution of African thought and literature around the world.

Haiti is also the poorest country in the Western hemisphere. On most measures of economic achievement, it ranks towards the bottom in the region, and also in the world. It is perhaps the only country in the world to have had, through the two hundred years of its independence, an economic product that has steadily grown *downwards* since its birth. It is perhaps the only tropical country in the world to have a significant chunk of its territory covered by barren rock and brush—the legacy of an environmental holocaust—in a climate strongly conducive to fecundity. Despite the enlightenment of some of its leaders, others had defined through their rule the very essence of inhumanity. However, the country has never completely collapsed. It has never been a “failed state,” in the contemporary international jargon, but a perennially failing one.

Part of the answer as to why Haiti has acquired such unique historical characteristics lies in the evolution of its political economy before and after its independence. Colonial Haiti was the gem of the Caribbean. With freewheeling ports and large plantations that grew tobacco, coffee and molasses for Europe, Haiti was the region’s most sought after territory.<sup>1</sup> French colonial rule, however, had certain particularities. Two ground-breaking works—Michel-Rolph Trouillot’s study of the Duvalier era, *Haiti: State Against Nation*, and Joan Dayan’s study of the links between Haitian history, religion and literature, *Haiti, History and Gods*—point to several of these and their subsequent impact on the course of Haitian history.

An important particularity of the colonial political economy identified by Trouillot, and by anthropologist Sidney Mintz, were the *gens de couleur*, or people of mixed race, who were the offspring of French plantation owners and slave women. Unlike their English colonial counterparts, the French frequently indulged in conjugal relationships with their slaves, thus giving rise to a class of *mulattoes* who were often sent to France to be educated in the French language and customs. These colored individuals frequently aspired to, and sometimes attained, the commercial status and properties of their masters.<sup>2</sup> Another important particularity identified by Trouillot related to land ownership in the colonial economy. The French not only sired children with their slaves, but let the latter farm small vegetable plots on their estates. For slaves who were otherwise horribly repressed, these plots were the only positive elements in their lives. After serving a long day under brutal conditions as members of organized labor gangs, slaves could return to their plots, where they were “masters of the soil.” While the brutal press-gang overseer therefore became the epitome of evil, one’s own small plot of land became the pinnacle of good. Hence, when the slaves won their independence from the French and took over their

---

<sup>1</sup> Sidney Mintz, *Can Haiti Change?*, Foreign Affairs, Vol. 74, No. 1, page 74

<sup>2</sup> Sidney Mintz, *Can Haiti Change?*, Foreign Affairs, Vol. 74, No. 1, page 76.

master's lands, many of them chose not to revive the plantation economy<sup>3</sup> and its forced labor, but instead divided the land into small landholdings geared towards subsistence agriculture and the generation of modest surpluses. In their strident egalitarianism on this issue, they predated rural Maoism by a century-and-a-half.

Smallholding, however virtuous it was for the freed slaves, held little promise for the *gens de couleur*, who had thrived in the plantation economy. Their motives for rebellion against the French had more in common with the burghers who led the American war of independence than with the slaves who sought a rural idyll, i.e., they wished to overthrow the French yoke so that they could exploit the riches of Saint-Domingue not as second-class citizens but as entrepreneurs in their own right. Their conception of land use therefore involved a continuation of the plantation economy rather than subsistence farming. While slaves and the *gens de couleur*, or *mulattoes*, joined hands to fight the war of independence, their differing conceptions of Haiti's political economy clashed shortly after independence, when the country's militantly egalitarian first president—Dessalines—was assassinated in a conspiracy reportedly fomented by his *mulatto* general Petion, who then became president.

Haiti's *mulattoes*, however, did not try to force the peasantry back into a plantation economy. Having fought a war against the French together with the freed slaves, they did not wish to undertake coercive actions that would have been tantamount to re-establishing slavery. The peasants were allowed to retain their own plots of land, a right which they had won from the French plantation owners, and which defined Haitian nationhood.<sup>4</sup> While a brief attempt was made shortly after independence under the breakaway regime of Henri Christophe in the north of Haiti to revive the plantation economy, the subsequent death of Christophe and the re-unification of Haiti paved the way for the institutionalization of a static economic equilibrium.<sup>5</sup>

In this new economic order, the *mulattoes*—both military and civilian—joined hands with the black officer class in the army to form a mercantile elite that dominated a largely extractive state.<sup>6</sup> The primary division social division, however, was not between people of different color, but between an urban class that derived its income from the export of the modest surplus created by the peasantry, and a peasant class who owned their own land but who had their small surpluses expropriated for export by the city dwellers. This primarily economic division was reinforced by a cultural division in which the urban elite spoke French, equated erudition with a French education, and practiced Catholicism. The peasantry,

---

<sup>3</sup> Mintz, pages 79-81.

<sup>4</sup> See Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Haiti-State Against Nation: The Origins and Legacy of Duvalierism*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1990, pp. 49-50.

<sup>5</sup> Mintz, page 79.

<sup>6</sup> See Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Haiti-State Against Nation: The Origins and Legacy of Duvalierism*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1990, pp. 44-48.

on the other hand, spoke Creole, placed a premium on practical knowledge of agriculture, and practiced *voudou* under a veneer of Catholicism.

While allowing the peasantry to retain their plots of land, the Haitian state continued to levy progressively higher taxes via customs houses on the export of peasant produce. The middle-men who brought this produce to the ports passed these taxes on to the peasants. Eventually, custom house receipts became the mainstay of the Haitian state, which had organized itself not to invest in growing the economy or developing factors of production, but to merely collect revenues. The Haitian elite sustained itself through parasitic taxation rather than through production; the more thorough exploitation of the countryside for commercial purposes was stayed by an informal social pact that arose from the shared legacy of the struggle for independence.

Given the parasitic nature of the Haitian state, Haitian politics became centered around struggles among various urban groups to control the biggest chunk of taxation revenues.<sup>7</sup> Politicians became more obsessed with the ritual and procedure of politics, which affected their ability to grab a share of state's bounty for their constituencies, than with larger social and economic questions. Of course, this obsession was frequently couched in a nobler political discourse that mirrored the existing debates in Europe. This situation has not changed much in contemporary Haiti, where the political system remains incapable of articulating a national project that would employ the energies of all sectors in promoting development, and remains focused on the appropriation of spoils for political loyalists.

Perhaps the most significant question in Haitian history remains that of the failure of country's elite to ever create a nation-wide development enterprise.<sup>8</sup> Despite the potential for significant commercial earnings from the production and export of cash crops, the state did little to foster the requisite political economy. While the building of common cause with slaves to obtain independence from the French might explain the *bourgeoisie's* initial reluctance to coerce the peasantry into a massive revival of the plantation economy, it does not explain the subsequent inability of the elite to foster, even given these parameters, the modicum of economic growth or expansion. A partial explanation has been identified by Trouillot, who points out that the sixty-year embargo slapped on Haiti by foreign powers in the nineteenth century for daring to overthrow its colonial masters stunted the development of the Haitian economy by making it more profitable for Haitian and foreign merchants to exploit loopholes in the embargo than to make investments in productive capital.<sup>9</sup> A broader explanation, however, may also lie in the sweep of Haitian history.

---

<sup>7</sup> Trouillot, Pages 85-86.

<sup>8</sup> Trouillot, Chapter 2, "A Republic for the Merchants."

<sup>9</sup> Mintz, pages 78-79. See also Trouillot, pp. 50-58, 64-69.

Historically, countries that have been able to create economic development and expansion have had either strongly cohesive national identities, such as the United States or the United Kingdom, or have had strong elites that have not, for reasons of ideology or race, hesitated to coerce other population groups within that country into providing the raw material for economic expansion. Guatemala and South Africa fall within the latter category. A third category involves countries such as India and Brazil, where strong national identities have allowed the elite to persuade the rest of the population to bear the costs of economic expansion.

None of these circumstances were to be found in Haiti shortly after independence. The shared affinity between the elite and the masses brought about by the independence struggle did not translate into a cohesive enough national identity. The freed slaves viewed the elite and its wealth with suspicion. Their egalitarian ideals did not sit well with the latter's quest for profit and capital accumulation. The elite, on the other hand, viewed the peasantry's lack of economic yearning and their *voudou* practices with utter disdain. These mutually negative perceptions prevented the formation of any national capital generation enterprise over the next two centuries. The same factors perhaps also accounted for the inability of the Haitian elite to persuade the masses to participate voluntarily in any type of national development. Caught in an almost self-perpetuating equilibrium of mistrust, Haiti's social sectors have historically had only one collective enterprise to their credit—the war of independence that created the country.

Given its chronic inability to develop either a national program or a substantive politics, Haiti had seen a considerable devastation of its land and resources by the beginning of the twentieth century. Lack of investment and organization in agriculture, for instance, meant the absence of a system for adjudicating disputes over land titles, and also of any long-term attempts to conserve or renew the soil. Little protection or incentive was provided to the peasantry to enable it to develop its land.<sup>10</sup> There were no rural services provided by the state to enable the farmers to capitalize on their natural inclination to form instant cooperative work-gangs (or *konbite*<sup>11</sup>) to assist each other in times of distress.<sup>12</sup> The practice of forming *konbite*, a residual albeit voluntary phenomenon from the colonial days, indicated a strong communal spirit among the peasantry that, while it may not have led to cooperative land ownership, certainly did augur well for cooperative investing, marketing and even profit-sharing. These modes of economic activity, if they had been fostered, would not just have led to rural development, but also have been compatible with peasant aversion to gross individual wealth accumulation.

---

<sup>10</sup> See Alex Dupuy, "Free Trade and Underdevelopment in Haiti: The World Bank/ USAID Agenda for Social Change in the post-Duvalier Era," in Hilbourne A. Watson, ed., *The Caribbean in the Global Political Economy*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1994, p. 100.

<sup>11</sup> *Haiti--Building Democracy*, Catholic Institute for International Relations: Comment, February 1996, page 23.

<sup>12</sup> Perhaps the most authentic account of the potential of Haiti's peasantry is provided by the Haitian author Jacques Roumain in his classic 1944 novel *Masters of the Dew*.

Following the end of the Civil War, the United States had ended its participation in the Western embargo on Haiti, and had recognized the country. US mercantile interest, waxing rapidly in Latin America and the Pacific, soon turned towards Haiti, where the growing crisis over land and resources had also led to a more rapid turnover in governments. The increased instability and levels of violence, and the Chase National Bank's interest in protecting its Haitian interests, led the United States to intervene in Haiti in 1915. The intervention's primary objective was marketize the country's economy, and create an outlet for US investment. The US military commanders, in accordance with the prevalent racial attitudes at the time, quickly identified the *mulattoes* among the elite as their primary intermediaries. This was their first error as far as establishing a market economy was concerned. The system, as it existed, did not yet—despite ongoing crises—offer the elite enough incentives for change. The US military commanders also decided that the peasantry was idle and had to be forced into productive work. This assessment was, of course, quite incorrect. US attempts to press the peasantry into work gangs to build roads for a market economy soon prompted a peasant revolt led by Charlemagne Peralte, who kept American marines distracted from their nation-building enterprise for the better part of the duration of the US intervention.

US commanders also concluded that the inability of the Haitian state to spread its mantle throughout the countryside was one of the barriers to economic organization. This conclusion was incorrect, in that it was the balance between Port-au-Prince and the various outposts of the state in the regional centers that had stayed all-out parasitic repression in the first place. In addition, the Haitian army still retained the sense of having led its people to independence, and therefore of treating them with a modicum of respect.

US commanders replaced this old army with the Garde Nationale d'Haiti, which was trained to inflict its will more systematically and which later became the dreaded Forces Armée d'Haiti (FAd'H). The new guard saw less reason to be restrained when taxing the common Haitians. In fact, it saw itself as constituting a new praetorian elite, and therefore undeserving of any kind of challenge or balance.

In the aftermath of the US departure from Haiti in 1934, the guard played an increasingly prominent role in internal repression. Simultaneously, a small largely-black middle class spawned by US military and economic projects began to espouse views that often clashed with those of the traditional elite. In the 1950s, this group generated a nationalist movement called Les Griots. Riding this wave of black nationalism, and also the backs of the repressive new army, a physician named Francois Duvalier ascended to the presidency in 1957. Like all nationalists and populists that preceded him, Duvalier began his presidency by targeting select members of the *mulatto* elite, and even the Catholic Church that had traditionally supported the establishment. He drove several members of this gentry into exile. The remnants quickly adapted to the new order, which consisted of a cult of personality brutally and arbitrarily enforced at all levels of Haitian society by the notorious Volunteers for National Security, or

*tonton macoutes*. Like his populist predecessors, Duvalier started out claiming to be able to emancipate the masses, but instead created an even more oppressive and dysfunctional version of the system centered entirely on himself. Despite his rhetoric, however, Duvalier was no messiah for Haiti's masses. Under his vicious rule, Haiti's economy sank even further. And in spite of their apparent persecution, the merchants increased their share of the country's wealth. Social inequities became worse.

After his death in 1971, Duvalier was succeeded by his son Jean-Claude, who had a milder temperament than his father. In many ways, he was the kind of benign despot who was seen as a force for growth in the developing world at that time. Foreign donors therefore conceived of a new strategy for Haiti, which was predicated on the assumption that Haiti's only remaining comparative advantage as an economy was the availability of labor at rock-bottom prices for assembling consumer goods primarily for the US market. Under this strategy, assembly industries, once established and flourishing, would form the engine for growth that would motor the rest of the economy.<sup>13</sup> International assistance, then, would contribute towards creating state institutions that could guarantee a stable and free market for the assembly manufacturers, and towards providing infrastructure such as power plants and feeder roads for the assembly plants.

While this development strategy was based in sound economic theory, several things went wrong with its implementation.<sup>14</sup> First, to the extent that the strategy was not formulated on the basis of a broad popular or even an elite consensus, it could not mobilize the majority of the Haitians to make it work. Second, the Duvalier state was as lacking in social and economic roots<sup>15</sup> in the rest of Haitian society as its predecessors, even though it had access to a large and decentralized mechanism for inflicting terror in the form of the *tontons macoutes*.<sup>16</sup> Lacking roots, and therefore substance, the state did not take the effort to streamline and modernize itself to run a competitive and productive market economy to benefit the majority of Haitians, as had been anticipated by the foreign donors.<sup>17</sup> Third, Haitian elites who subcontracted and worked for the assembly manufacturers transferred all their earnings abroad, and did not reinvest in Haiti to create a sustainable indigenous dynamic of savings, reinvestment, and new production. In the absence of a broader national framework, the elite saw little incentive for keeping their

---

<sup>13</sup> See Dupuy in the *The Caribbean in the Global Political Economy*, pages 93-95.

<sup>14</sup> For arguments in support of an assembly manufacturing-led growth strategy for Haiti, see Clive Gray, "Alternative Models for Haiti's Economic Reconstruction," and Mats Lundahl, "The Haitian Dilemma Reexamined," in Robert Rotberg, ed., *Haiti Renewed: Political and Economic Prospects*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press: 1997.

<sup>15</sup> See Robert Maguire et al., *Haiti Held Hostage: International Responses to the Quest for Nationhood, 1986 to 1996*, Thomas J. Watson Institute for International Studies and United Nations University: Occasional Paper #23, 1996, page 8.

<sup>16</sup> For a brief outline of the thirty year reign of terror of the *tontons macoutes*, and the possibly irreversible scar it has left on Haiti's national psyche, see Michel S. Laguerre, "The Tontons Macoutes," in *The Haiti Files*.

<sup>17</sup> See Dupuy in Watson, pages 95-96.

money within the country.<sup>18</sup> Also, while the Duvalier regime's nationalism had helped to create a tiny black middle class, it had done little to diminish the stranglehold of a few large mercantile families on the Haitian economy.<sup>19</sup> These families had little interest in increasing local production.<sup>20</sup> Hence, even assembly manufacturing did not reach its full potential.

An important apparent lapse in these development policies was to not take into account the historic exclusion of the peasantry by the ruling elite.<sup>21</sup> The general assumption was that as the decline of Haitian agriculture continued to produce an outflow of migrants to the cities, they would be absorbed by the new industries. However, since the latter did not live up to their full potential, the unabsorbed migrants congregated in large slums in Port-au-Prince. Those peasants that still remained in the rural areas had little contact with the state, and little access to services with which to develop their considerable artisanal and productive talents.

A focused effort to marketize this peasantry through devices that have been used elsewhere in the developing world such as rural cooperatives and micro-credit could have led to some positive engagement between the state and the peasantry. Given the fact that, despite years of massive migration, most Haitians still live rural lives, any engagement between the state and the peasantry might have allowed the former to move beyond parasitism. What was needed was a development strategy that *required* the fullest possible engagement between the state and its people, even if such a strategy made only partial economic sense in the short run, since such engagement might have prompted a more resilient political process better able to deal with internal tensions. A state situated within a more substantial national framework might, then, have fulfilled international expectations by providing stable support for a flourishing market that, among other industries, would also have allowed assembly manufacturing to take root.<sup>22</sup> Given the stark divergence of the elite and peasant conceptions of Haitian nationhood shortly after independence, the issue of the peasants' status was not just significant from the economic standpoint, but also from the perspective of defining the nature and the role of the Haitian state in the country's economy and society. Furthermore, enabling the peasants to acquire sustainable and

---

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., page 97.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., page 98. Also see Trouillot, page 158.

<sup>20</sup> For a detailed account of the role of big mercantile families in Haiti's economy, see "Haiti's 'Economic Barons': Memo from Congressman Walter E. Fauntroy," in *The Haiti Files*.

<sup>21</sup> According to Trouillot, "By ignoring the problems of the rural world and the relationship between it and the urban classes, the light industry strategy in the end complicated them." Trouillot, *Haiti--Nation Against State*, page 210.

<sup>22</sup> A review article by Peter M. Lewis that surveys several recent volumes which draw lessons from the experience of promoting development and economic reform in Africa points to the nature of governance in a society--the institutions of the state, the relations between these institutions and the people, and the social coalitions that engender these relations--as key variables in determining the path of economic reform. "Economic Reform and Political Transition in Africa: The Quest for a Politics of Development," *World Politics*, 49 (October 1996), pages 92-129.

profitable livelihoods in their localities would also have prevented the rapid growth of slums in the cities during the mid-1970s to mid-1980s.

In the event this did not happen, large numbers of Haitians not only came to cities to find themselves unemployed but, freed for the first time in their history from rural isolation, discovered that at the heart of a lot of their problems lay a non-functioning state. The equilibrium of mistrust that had defined the economic and political parameters of Haiti since independence had now been disturbed.

Beginning in the early 1980s, a movement for change grew in both urban and rural areas that sought a sometimes violent overthrow of what was seen as a failed system.<sup>23</sup> This movement was led first by the Haitian version of the Roman Catholic liberation theology church, the *ti legliz*,<sup>24</sup> and then increasingly by the progressive members of a small middle class that had grown under the wings of foreign development assistance and *maquiladora* investment. Popular frustrations, accentuated by the massive numbers of Haitians living in slums, often led to violent incidents between the elite and the activists. The state, knowing no other form of response, reacted with brute force. The resulting domestic and international reaction caused Jean-Claude Duvalier to flee into exile in 1986. General Namphy took control of the government.

In the four years following the departure of Jean-Claude Duvalier, Haiti saw a number of coups and ineffective governments as the elite reacted to the popular upsurge. Clearly, Haiti's wholly inadequate political process could neither manage the economic development program of the 1980s, nor the consequences that ensued from its failure.

A potentially important moment in Haitian history, perhaps the first opportunity to generate a truly national enterprise since the struggle for independence, was lost in 1987, when a National Congress of Democratic Movements representing Haitians of all stripes—leaders of the peasantry, the business elite, religious organizations, human rights groups, and others—was convened to assist in drafting a post-Duvalier constitution. With their totalitarian repression, the Duvaliers had achieved what other more noble causes had failed to achieve—a uniting of all of Haiti's sectors as had not been seen since the ceremony at Bois-Caiman in 1791 that had launched the country's war for independence. The Congress concluded with support for Haiti's new 1987 Constitution, a Provisional Electoral Council to conduct the next elections, and a plan to keep the various sectors mobilized and coordinated in support of democracy.

Yet this opportunity was soon lost. Haiti's friends in the region, for reasons that are still unclear, chose to ignore what was clearly a democratic and progressive movement and perhaps the best bet to promote both free markets and democracy, and supported instead the promises of General Namphy that

---

<sup>23</sup> See Marx V. Aristide and Laurie Richardson, "The Popular Movement," in *The Haiti Files*. Also see Alex Dupuy, *Haiti in the New World Order: The Limits of the Democratic Revolution*, Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1997, pp. 97-98.

<sup>24</sup> For a summary of *ti legliz* activities, see *Haiti--Building Democracy*, page 7.

he could guarantee a stable democratic transition and hold a fair elections. When the elections were eventually held, the Congress' candidate Gerard Gourgue, was expected to win. General Namphy's thugs, however, carried out a massacre at a polling station that led to the elections being annulled. This tragedy was both poignant and ironic. If the Congress had won, the elections might have set the stage for first significant, and more moderate and progressive, re-orientation of the country since its independence. In the event that the massacre convinced most Haitians that more extreme steps were called for, and set the stage for a dynamic of response and counter-response between the elite and the masses. The lack of strong external support for the Congress was also clearly a failure of preventive action on the part of international actors, in that an opportunity was lost to pre-empt the conflict that followed and to save the hundreds of millions of dollars spent on keeping peace in its aftermath.

The failed elections of 1987 were followed by rigged elections in 1988, which prompted the international community, with monitors from the UN, OAS, CARICOM and the US, to intervene to guarantee free and fair elections in 1990—the first of their kind in Haitian history.<sup>25</sup> A former World Bank official, Marc Bazin, headed a coalition of progressive parties and was viewed as a likely winner. Instead, to the elite's chagrin, he lost to the popular priest, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who had proposed a popular upsurge or 'Lavalas'—literally “flood”—against corrupt governance. Traditional political parties affiliated with the elite retained control, however, of the parliament.

The loose movement that had coalesced under Aristide's leadership during this period under the “Lavalas” banner offered a comprehensive cross-section of pro-democracy trends in Haiti. It included venerable peasant movements such as the Hinche-based Mouvement Papaye de Paysan; the remnants of the 1987 CONACOM; some representatives of a still small, but increasingly larger and progressive, middle class; a wide range of human rights and pro-democracy organizations; and a host of discordant “popular organizations” constituted primarily of slum-based and unemployed migrants. To the extent that they were subsumed under Aristide's fiery rhetoric and messianic persona, to which they willingly submitted order to ensure victory in the 1990 elections, “Lavalas” was seen as a monolith by many in the international community, and the primary political split in Haiti, and hence the need for dialogue, was also unfortunately seen as being between “Lavalas” on the one hand, and a handful of small opposition parties representing the traditional elite on the other.

On assuming the presidency, Aristide and his supporters appropriated the term “Lavalas” for their government. In the nine months of the first Aristide government in 1991, clashes between the parliament and the presidency were frequent. However, this was not parliamentary politics of a

---

<sup>25</sup> For an account of the international community's role in these elections, see David Malone, *Decision-Making in the UN Security Council: The Case of Haiti, 1990-1997* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), pp. 50-54.

conventional sort. The Lavalas government and its opponents both brought their supporters out into the streets to push their positions. This was a frightening time for Haiti's traditional elite. Many interpreted Aristide's fiery rhetoric regarding the uprooting of the old system as calling for their physical extermination. However, they only reacted to this situation, and did not take measures to challenge Aristide by reaching out to the population on their own, or by building agendas and strategies of a progressive nature. The technocrats in the Aristide government, on the other hand, were able to come up with an economic plan that won the approval of international financial institutions.<sup>26</sup> The plan sought to streamline government<sup>27</sup>, collect taxes efficiently, and redefine the role of the state as a net provider of services, and not as a net extractor of value. However, the government failed to put this plan to public debate, thus foregoing the opportunity to build consensus around its key tenets. Instead, rowdy demonstrators called for compliance with the Lavalas agenda.<sup>28</sup> For their part, many in the elite saw the plan as being little more than a vendetta against their interests. In the absence of attempts to construct a broader, more sober, consensus, the plan became a victim of Haiti's perennial theatre of violence. And so did the progressive agenda of the first Aristide government. Fearing extinction, Haiti's elite and the armed forces allied with it responded with a coup in September, 1991.

It is important to note that Aristide was catapulted to power in the 1990 elections not on the basis of a popular desire for the institutions and norms of democracy, but as the vanguard of a new regime that would fundamentally transform the polity in a radical fashion. These expectations, reflected in Aristide's 'flood' rhetoric, contradicted the gradualist approach of both those members of the "Lavalas" alliance who belonged to the small but growing middle class and the few progressive elements among the traditional political and economic elite. The elected government of 1990-91, therefore, embodied a fundamental contradiction. It sought to address popular demands for overwhelming social and economic change through the forms and institutions of electoral democracy, which traditionally postdate such change and are ill-adapted to rapid and radical transformation. This contradiction was perpetuated in 1994 when Aristide was restored to power.

Many have argued that both Gerard Gourgue and Marc Bazin, unburdened by Aristide's apocalyptic visions of cleansing floods and fires and the historical memories these evoked of Dessalines' pogroms, might have been better able to persuade the Haitian elite to accept a progressive program of change. While this question cannot be answered hypothetically, it is quite clear that both the 1987 Congress and the ensuing elections, as well as the economic plan of the first Lavalas government, constituted significant opportunities for Haiti to move forward together as a nation. In both instances,

---

<sup>26</sup> See Donald E. Schulz and Gabriel Marcella, *Reconciling the Irreconcilable: The Troubled Outlook for US Policy Toward Haiti*, US Army War College: Strategic Studies Institute, March 10 1994, page 12.

<sup>27</sup> Robert Maguire et al., page 18.

<sup>28</sup> Schulz and Marcella, pages 9-11.

however, Haiti's friends and neighbors displayed great ambiguity towards these historic moments, and the moments were soon lost. Subsequently, numerous efforts have been carried out in vain by the international community to re-create the possibilities that these moments represented.

### **III. The International Response to Conflict in Haiti**

After taking power, the military regime embarked on campaign of systematic slaughter of "Lavalas" activists. This campaign, and the resulting outflow of refugees, prompted a concerted international response. The response of the two regional organizations of which Haiti is a member—the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM)—was especially vigorous, spurred by both the OAS' firm post-Cold War commitment to the consolidation of democracy in the Western Hemisphere<sup>29</sup> and the crucial role played by both organizations in facilitating and monitoring the election won by Aristide. The OAS rapidly suspended all aid to Haiti, except humanitarian assistance. When the OAS delegation negotiating with the military regime was ordered to leave the country, the organization called on members to impose a trade embargo.

In Autumn 1992, the UN authorized a joint OAS/UN envoy to negotiate with the military government.<sup>30</sup> The coup leader, General Cedras, accepted a proposal to establish a joint OAS/UN civilian mission (MICIVIH) to monitor human rights in Haiti and agreed to work under the leadership of the OAS/UN Special Envoy toward reviving Haiti's fledgling democratic institutions.

Efforts to engage the Haitian military in dialogue with Aristide, however, made little overall progress. On June 16, 1993, the Security Council placed an oil and arms embargo upon Haiti. Cedras then indicated a willingness to negotiate. The resulting agreement, signed at Governors' Island in New York, committed Cedras to retire from government and allow Aristide's return to Haiti. In the interim, Aristide was to work with the Haitian parliament to restore the normal functioning of Haiti's institutions, while the UN was to provide a small peacekeeping force to help modernize the armed forces and assist in the creation of a new civilian police force.

Initial signs were promising, with the Haitian parliament ratifying Aristide's appointment of Robert Malval as prime minister and the Security Council lifting the embargo on Haiti and authorizing a

---

<sup>29</sup> The increasing vigor of the OAS' commitment to democracy was dramatic: in 1985, the Protocol of Cartagena de Indias incorporated democracy-promotion in the OAS charter; in 1989, the Organization began to observe elections in Member states when requested; in 1990, it created a "Unit for Promotion of Democracy" and launched additional programs to bolster democratization; in 1991, its General Assembly adopted a mechanism to respond when democratic order is interrupted in any Member state; and in 1992, it strengthened its several instruments for promoting democratic government in the Protocol of Washington.

<sup>30</sup> David Malone's authoritative and detailed work, *Decision-Making in the UN Security Council: The Case of Haiti, 1990-1997*, provides the best available account of the complexities of international decision-making on Haiti in the aftermath of the overthrow of President Aristide in 1991.

United Nations Mission in Haiti (UNMIH). The promise quickly turned sour, however, when an UNMIH deployment was met by hostile demonstrations, prompting the withdrawal of the deployment and the flight of most members of the OAS/UN mission—MICIVIH—already in Haiti. The Security Council rapidly reimposed the arms and oil embargo and instituted a naval blockade.<sup>31</sup> On October 15, the Justice Minister in the Malval cabinet was assassinated. By early 1994, the few remaining MICIVIH personnel reported an alarming increase in human rights violations. Facing intransigence from the military government, the Security Council imposed further sanctions, to which the regime responded by appointing a ‘provisional’ president, who formally expelled MICIVIH from the country in July 1994.

By 1994, the deteriorating situation in Haiti had loosed a surge of refugees on American shores, putting domestic pressure on the Clinton Administration. The upshot of resulting US activism was a UN Security Council resolution authorizing the formation of a US-led "multi-national force" (MNF) to facilitate the departure from Haiti of the military leadership and the restoration of the legitimate authorities.

In mid-September 1994, President Clinton finally declared all diplomatic measures exhausted and ordered the MNF to use force to remove the military regime. Faced with this impending invasion, the Cedras regime appealed for a last-minute intercession. After skillful negotiation by a distinguished American team, Haiti's military leaders agreed to resign subject to an amnesty from the Haitian parliament. As a result, the MNF was able to move into Haiti on September 19 without opposition.<sup>32</sup> President Aristide returned to Haiti on October 15, 1994. In 1995, the MNF handed over the task of peacekeeping to UNMIH.

Subsequently, in 1998, after three years of peacekeeping, the UN Security Council reduced the UN role in Haiti to supporting the further development of a civilian police force. In 2000 the OAS/UN human rights monitoring mission, and UN peacekeeping in Haiti ended. A new civilian mission, MICAH, commenced, with a mandate to assist Haiti in the areas of justice, security, and human rights.

---

<sup>31</sup> The most comprehensive and critical analysis of these sanctions and their impact is offered by Elizabeth Gibbons in *Sanctions in Haiti: Human Rights and Democracy under Assault* (Washington D.C.: The CSIS Press, 1999). For another comprehensive review of the initial impact of these sanctions on Haiti, see *Sanctions in Haiti: Crisis in Humanitarian Action*, Harvard Center for Population and Development Studies: Program on Human Security Working Paper Series, November 1993.

<sup>32</sup> A critical assessment of the role of the Multinational Force in dealing with insecurity in Haiti is provided in Bob Shacochis, *The Immaculate Invasion* (New York: Penguin Books, 1999).

#### IV. Assessment of the International Response to the Crisis in Haiti

##### Successes and Setbacks in Haiti's Attempts to Build Lasting Peace

Successes	Setbacks
Restoration of elected government in 1994. First ever changeover of presidency through elections in Haiti's history in 1996.	Failure on the part of the political elite to reach consensus on the overall form or purpose of Haiti's democracy. Continued political deadlock.
Creation of a new civilian police force, the Haitian National Police. The first time in the country's history that uniformed authority had been neutral.	Continued institutional weakness of the police. Failure to check growing political interference in police work, and inability of police to control rising, including drug-related, crime.
Emergence of autonomous civil society—unions, peasant organizations, human rights groups, and trade and professional associations.	Reluctance on part of elite to allow civil society to play autonomous roles.
More proactive role by elements of traditional elites—Catholic and Protestant church hierarchies, Chamber of Commerce—in supporting the development of democratic political culture.	Electoral disputes, and worsening of the political deadlock, in the parliamentary and presidential elections of 2000.
Rise in numbers of international and domestic efforts to make economic assets available to the peasantry and the informal sector, i.e. the largest section of the Haitian population. Greater investment by Haitian diaspora in Haiti in aftermath of restoration of democracy.	Virtual absence of foreign investment in Haiti due to continued political instability and high crime rates. Inability of political system to absorb and use bilateral and multilateral foreign investment.

Despite numerous criticisms, both the initial international response to Haiti's immediate crisis and the subsequent peacekeeping operations accomplished their key goals. Haiti's elected government was restored, and a civilian police force created to replace the repressive army, all without losing a single peacekeeper.<sup>33</sup>

The key deficiencies in the international response to Haiti that became manifest shortly thereafter were not in the conduct of the peacekeeping operation in Haiti, but in the international strategy for understanding and dealing with Haiti's long-term political impasse. When Aristide was restored, so was the deadlock that had characterized his previous government. Part of the package for his restoration should have been the institution of a comprehensive multi-sectoral dialogue, chaired by him as the President, but facilitated by Haitian civil society and observed by the international community, on key elements of political and economic reform. In the absence of such an effort, Haiti's weak political institutions remained deadlocked along class and factional lines. The international community did not apprehend that the real divisions in Haiti are not between political parties: the political process does not accurately or substantively represent and embody the country's interest groups. There were no precedents or entities for facilitating gradual change through consensus; this was neither the focus of Aristide's rhetoric nor that of his opponents in the military and the oligarchy.

International actors—led by the European Union and the United States in this instance—have provided some assistance for building democratic practices into Haiti's nascent institutions. Political parties as well as parliamentarians have received training programs targeted at building their understanding of democratic political processes. Civic education programs targeted at inculcating democratic civic virtues have also been launched among the population-at-large. These tutelary approaches, however, have had little lasting impact. The population demands the radical redress of its more immediate plight and sees little gain from gradual democratization, while the political elite focuses on maintaining control of the limited state institutions.

The divisions between Aristide and his opponents are also reflected in the gradual inability of the new Haitian National Police, created after he abolished the army in 1995, to maintain law and order in a neutral or effective manner. Despite initial successes, primarily in rooting out corruption among its own ranks, the Police had a dismal record of following up on crimes, particularly where high-profile political assassinations were concerned. While during a political crisis in early 1999, the police did remain neutral and maintain public order, the protracted political deadlock and the ensuing suspension of international aid have badly affected the police force. Some officers have become involved in drug traffic as Haiti has

---

<sup>33</sup> The successes of both MNF and UNMIH are detailed in David Bentley, "Operation Uphold Democracy: Military Support for Democracy in Haiti," Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University: Strategic Forum, Number 78, June 1996.

become the favorite transshipment point for Colombian traffickers, handling 8% of all cocaine entering the US. Drug-related corruption extends through all levels of government and drug-funded construction has become Port-au-Prince's predominant economic activity. Partisan behavior by the police, often under political pressure, has grown. In the aftermath of the first round of parliamentary elections in 2000, a number of opposition candidates were arrested on dubious charges of fomenting political violence. After local and international protest, they were released. The continuing high crime rates and increasing politicization of the police have undermined confidence in the possibility of a democratic and neutral state that is able to provide all sectors with basic security. As a result, the popular yearning for a return to stronger, possibly authoritarian, government has grown.

It is noteworthy that the Police would have been less subject to political manipulation had it been better resourced and trained. In the aftermath of Aristide's restoration, however, the bulk of international assistance went towards the actual cost of peacekeeping and the revival of the moribund Haitian economy, and not towards the maintenance of a viable police force. Ironically, most of the economic assistance provided by external actors to Haiti remains unused, as a political system populated by politicians fearful for their lives has continued to be deadlocked and incapable of delivering the design and implementation of economic programs. Through practices tantamount to racketeering, the state apparatus has continued to reap benefits from the limited economic activity for those in authority. The line between the private and public sector has been blurred, with both sectors often controlled by the same elements.<sup>34</sup> Debates over privatization mask narrower factional disputes over control of a few state-owned enterprises.

Haiti's 1987 constitution bars two consecutive presidential terms. Hence, in accordance with his promise at Governors' Island to assist in building Haiti's frail institutions, Aristide agreed to step down as President at the end of his first term in 1996. His supporters, however, argued that since he had spent most of this term in exile, he should be allowed a second term. The international community informally backed the constitutional position. It helped to finance and monitor the presidential elections in 1995 that led Rene Preval to succeed Aristide as president, and has assisted with subsequent national and local elections. While the peaceful, democratic transfer of power from Aristide to Preval through elections was a historic accomplishment, as the first of its kind in the country's history, Haitian institutions subsequently became deadlocked.

The governments of both Aristide and Preval had agreed to implement the economic plan first conceived at the beginning of the Aristide presidency, with the support of international financial institutions, in 1991. Key elements of this plan were a restructuring and privatization of the small and

---

<sup>34</sup> See Jean-Germain Gros, "Haiti's Flagging Transition," *Journal of Democracy*, 8, 4 (October 1997), p. 104.

corrupt public sector and a series of other economic reforms designed to boost the confidence of both Haitian and international entrepreneurs. Aristide argued that this reform package would only benefit a small elite and cause great suffering to the majority of the population. His opposition to this plan from mid-1995 onwards halted key components of the reform process. Neither Aristide nor his newly formed Fanmi Lavalas party sought to promote a multi-sectoral dialogue on an alternative path to economic reform that could have addressed what might have been genuine concerns regarding the stringent demands made by international financial institutions. The pre-coup “Lavalas” movement had, by contrast, displayed a talent for generating creative solutions and compromises through dialogue. A key difference was that many talented negotiators and functionaries in the “Lavalas” movement had grown disillusioned with Aristide’s assumption of a messianic persona and had either formed splinter parties, or moved into the private or non-profit sectors, leaving Haiti altogether.

The stand-off over economic reform was complicated by a dispute over the legislative and municipal elections of April 6, 1997. The electoral process was halted before the second round of voting.<sup>35</sup> In June 1997, Prime Minister Rosny Smarth resigned in frustration, further paralyzing the government.<sup>36</sup> Successive attempts to appoint a Prime Minister foundered over splits between the two major factions into which “Lavalas” legislators in parliament had split over Aristide’s policies and persona—the anti-Aristide Organization of People in Struggle (OPL) and the pro-Aristide Fanmi Lavalas. In March 1999, after concerted facilitation efforts by international mediators and some civic organizations, certain opposition parties reached an informal accord with the President for appointing an interim prime minister and a new Electoral Council, and for holding new legislative elections. The costly consequence of this political wrangling was to delay large amounts of international development assistance. The deadlock also caused an almost complete dissipation of the popular energies and enthusiasm generated by the democracy movement of late 1980s. Despite international efforts, the Haitian political process thus appeared largely incapable of addressing internal tensions.

In May and June 2000, legislative and municipal elections were finally held to break this deadlock. In the first round, between 55-60% of the electorate voted, the majority for Fanmi Lavalas, perhaps in the hope that having the presidency and parliament under the same party would break the political deadlock. A dispute quickly arose over electoral procedure. International observers demanded a recount for certain seats in the Senate before second round voting. The Haitian government refused,

---

<sup>35</sup> On August 19, 1997, the United Nations suspended electoral assistance to Haiti until the Provisional Electoral Council could establish that it was capable of holding a free and fair elections. Michael Norton, "UN suspends election aid in Haiti," Associated Press, August 22, 1997.

<sup>36</sup> An interesting explanation for disputes among current Haitian politicians, many of whom supported Aristide at one point, has been offered by Andrew Reding, who suggests that Haiti's winner-take-all electoral system, as opposed to the kind of proportional representation system that prevails in South Africa, is putting heavy stress on a nascent democracy. "Exorcising Haiti's Ghosts," *World Policy Journal*, Spring 1996, page 21.

saying that it could not control the decisions of the Provisional Electoral Council. The latter defended its vote-count formula, saying that it had improvised under highly imperfect circumstances. Controversy grew with the flight to the US of the Council's chairman, who claimed that his life had been threatened. When the Haitian government decided to proceed with the second round of voting without recounting the first round, the OAS withdrew its observer mission. Shortly thereafter, the US suspended assistance to the country's police force. The opposition parties declared the onset of authoritarianism.

After several failed attempts by the international community to resolve the issue of the vote count in a manner that both Fanmi Lavalas and the opposition parties would find satisfactory, the Haitian government proceeded to conduct the presidential election in November 2000, despite international reservations. All opposition parties boycotted the election, and, as the same flawed Provisional Electoral Council conducted it, the international community did not recognize its results. Haiti's donors declared that they were suspending all official aid to the country until a solution to the political impasse had been found that was acceptable to all parties involved, and that future aid would be disbursed through NGOs.

Recently, the Organization of American States has resumed, through its Secretary-General Cesar Gaviria, its political role in the country, whereby it has been attempting to mediate between Aristide, who was re-elected president in 2000 in a controversial elections boycotted by the opposition, and an umbrella grouping of opposition parties. However, these and other international attempts at mediation, while laudable and partly successful, have rarely sought to engage the full spectrum of Haitian society so as to keep the primary political protagonists on their toes, and accountable for their words and actions. To the extent that all political actors in Haiti make their claims on behalf of the Haitian population, the latter might be in a better position to call them to order than the international community alone.

This cyclical dynamic of Haitian obstinacy and international reaction could have been arrested at a much earlier stage, when political deadlock first ensued in 1996-97, through a more creative application of international facilitation efforts to encourage Haitian civil society, particularly the Catholic and Protestant Churches, to play a more active role in bridging political divides. Instead, international mediators undertook informal efforts to negotiate between Aristide and the primary breakaway "Lavalas" faction, the OPL, and left aside both other political actors as well as key elements of civil society. These mediation efforts did not yield significant or quick results, and often left all parties pointing at external actors as unnecessarily meddling in Haitian affairs. It is important to note that despite Aristide's incumbency as President, Haiti's small middle class remains apprehensive of runaway populism. Aristide won the popular vote in the parliamentary and presidential elections of 2000, but lacks the confidence of the business and middle classes, a minority whose entrepreneurial and managerial talent is essential for Haiti's economic revival. Elections are not the central issue; the underlying problem is the different social sectors' near total lack of confidence in each others' objectives and intentions.

A starting point for confidence-building would be to work towards consensus, with Haiti's small but increasingly active civil society as the intermediary, on a few pragmatic issues whereby the state can direct its limited resources and energies towards providing security and primary capital such as roads, education and micro-credit lending. The provision of such goods should benefit all classes and sectors, and allow for real growth in the Haitian economy. Discourse centered on such public goods may also allow for Haiti's national debates to move from the divisive discourse of wealth redistribution to that of more equitable opportunities for wealth creation. Initiatives to provide appropriately targeted credit, and convert informal holdings to formal titles, have led peasants in parts of the country both to revive and expand market production, and could be encouraged. International donors could encourage cooperative farming in order to eliminate the inefficiencies of scale generated by smallholder farming.

In this context, it is important to note that localized schemes have helped to bring parts of the country's sizeable informal economy into the economic mainstream, by giving informal entrepreneurs titles to their assets and registering them so that they are eligible for assistance, such as small loans and credit, on easy terms. Prominent examples include a plan developed jointly by the Aristide government and by the Center for Free Enterprise and Democracy with the assistance of economist Hernando de Soto to formalize informal property holdings, and the significant expansion of its loan portfolio by one of the country's largest commercial banks, Sogebank, to include micro-entrepreneurs.<sup>37</sup> Economic purists may argue that this is an inefficient, small-scale approach to poverty reduction – but micro-entrepreneurism has proven to be a workable approach to long-term growth, and may be a more realistic option in a post-conflict economy than schemes for attracting large industry.

The discourse on public goods could also focus on the country's moribund judicial system, which has not benefited from well-meaning international attempts to reform it (such attempts reportedly having been carried out without any regard for Haiti's special circumstances). Haiti has recently experienced a surge in decentralized social violence. Disputes over land property have increasingly been resolved, in the absence of a functioning judiciary, through violence. In an effort to build non-violent dispute resolution skills, the government's land reform agency, INARA, has tried to incorporate informal arbitration in its programs, with modest results. Jacques-Edouard Alexis, until recently the prime minister of Haiti, has expressed his interest in a national conflict resolution program to develop appropriate skills among the leadership. Civic actors have also proposed a system involves traveling courts, whereby judges and clerks spend a day in a locality dealing with disputes before moving on to the next district. In addition, civil society organizations of all stripes have joined a growing chorus for administrative and political

---

<sup>37</sup> The bank, which currently has as clients 700 street-side sellers of a variety of goods, plans to raise its roster to 10,000 by 2002, a sign of the commercial success of this program. See David Gonzalez, "Port-au-Prince Journal: A Haitian Bank Takes to the Streets," *The New York Times*, April 17 2001

decentralization, so that the endless deadlocks among the elite in Port-au-Prince do not stymie creative energies at the community level. Both alternative arbitration and decentralization could form important elements of a multi-sectoral consensus.

Some of the best prospects for building such a consensus in Haiti may lie with civil society. For instance, the informal 1999 accord that paved the way for elections in 2000, and which also produced an interim government with ministers drawn from both Fanmi Lavalas and opposition camps, arose partly from small-scale efforts towards multi-sectoral dialogue supported by the International Peace Academy. This dialogue also assisted in the formation of an autonomous civil society group, the National Council for Electoral Observation, which successfully promoted voter education before the parliamentary elections in 2000, and then performed credibly its primary function of electoral observation. It also convened Fanmi Lavalas and its opponents in informal meetings prior to the elections to obtain guarantees from all sides to ensure a peaceful electoral process. Given the overall level of political tension, the elections were remarkably free of violence. Subsequently, this dialogue also yielded the Civil Society Initiative, which facilitated negotiations to end the deadlock between Aristide and the opposition in January 2001 and which, for the first time, involved both the mainstream Catholic and Protestant Churches in a joint facilitation role. While these negotiations deadlocked, civil society groups were able to ensure that when they did re-start, the protagonists resumed discussions from their last known positions rather than reinventing the game all over again. Members of the Initiative have shuttled, with modest success, not just between politicians of various stripes, but also between the Aristide camp and key sectors such as business and the middle class. As a result, Aristide is now backing, for instance, key private sector initiatives to marketize the informal economy. Members of the Initiative have also started, with backing from the European Union, a number of multi-sectoral policy dialogues aimed at generating concrete proposals for government action.

Another hopeful sign is the continued resilience of some long-standing grassroots organizations, which provided the original backbone for the “Lavalas” movement. These include the Mouvement Papaye Paysan, Haiti’s oldest peasant movement, and the Assembly of Popular Organization Power (PROP) that had first organized slum-dwellers into a political force on behalf of Aristide. These groups have begun to develop issue-specific agendas, critical of the policies of La Fanmi Lavalas. Church movements are also reconfiguring their political alignments. A growing evangelical movement, which subscribes to the populist right-of-center values similar to those held by their Guatemalan counterparts, has begun to challenge both the political establishment and the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church’s Commission for Justice and Peace, one of the strongest defenders of human rights in Haiti and long a standard-bearer for “Lavalas,” has begun to take an increasingly independent stance against human rights violations by all sides. Although the industrial and professional sectors remain small, unions such as the National

Federation of Haitian Educators (CNEH) and the Organization of Haitian Industrial Workers (OGITH) have begun to take more consistent and independent positions on key issues. This political activity augurs well for wider democratic participation and representation.

Focused discussion on ways to achieve pragmatic compromises between different sectors is necessary to develop and implement a process of economic and political reform. Several steps can be taken to promote this. The policy dialogues developed by the Civil Society Initiative may assist political discourse in moving beyond one of grievance to an articulation of concrete policy differences and options. They may also serve to build trust and confidence between the various sectors. Haiti clearly demonstrates that, in an atmosphere of fear and recrimination, inter-sectoral relations must improve before elections or other trappings of democratic governance can be devised, or else electoral or other democratic outcomes will not win the support of those sectors that feel threatened. This does not imply that newly democratic governments should not be launched through electoral means. Elections, however, are only one element in a wider process to alter inter-sectoral relations and create genuine participation.

Recently, members of the Civil Society Initiative have proposed the establishment of a Center that, with international support, could assist politicians and political parties in acquiring and deploying some of the basic tools of democratic political discourse, including coalition building and cooperative drafting of legislation.

In addition to the above, alternative forms of political participation that aid the process of institution-building are needed *until* the formal institutions acquire the desired capacity. These alternative forms of participation can be generated within the context of existing policies. For instance, the implementation of specific international initiatives to address the problems of development and the environment in Haiti could be accompanied by broad-based dialogues among the sectors most likely to be affected by them.<sup>38</sup> A process of identifying common gains and of mutual guarantees could be a very powerful tool for building lasting interaction. Such interaction could eventually form the basis for consensual national frameworks for social and economic action. Several international projects of this kind have recently unfolded. A USAID project in Fond Jean-Noel, has constituted a federation of 18,000 farmers into 25 cooperatives to grow and directly market Haitian Bleu coffee for export to US markets, a scheme which has fostered both enterprise and environmental conservation.

Popular participation may also provide the key to better policing. In an effort to reduce police corruption, and bring policing closer to the communities, a number of external actors, particularly Canada, have sought to institute community policing practices. However, tense social and inter-sectoral

---

<sup>38</sup> Some USAID projects in recent years had begun to show a laudable trend towards more participatory project implementation in Haiti. See Mimi Whitfield, "Clean water, garbage pickup slated for Cite Soleil slum," The Miami Herald, November 3, 1997.

relations, land disputes, and vigilantism have hampered the potential for such policing.

Perhaps the greatest threat to law and order remains the increasing use of Haiti as a transshipment point by drug traffickers for drugs flowing from Colombia to the US. The narco-economy provides both a disincentive to legitimate state activity and an incentive to illegitimate activity – supporting a web of civic corruption. Given the overall dereliction of the Haitian state and the political system, and also the international consensus on withholding official aid until the political impasse is broken, the only short-term solutions to controlling the problem lie among Haiti's neighbors. One possibility is to engage private professional security firms from among Haiti's neighbors to perform interdiction duties immediately outside Haiti's territorial waters. Another, less politically cumbersome, proposal might be to make an exception to the general policy of withholding official assistance by training and resourcing Haiti's small customs force, which has reputedly performed heroically in daunting circumstances.

Political violence has caused some of Haiti's most promising talent to flee the country. Some have suggested creating a special security force, drawn from the police, for protecting senior government officials, leaders of political parties, and other high-profile political personalities. However, this carries the risk of becoming a 'praetorian guard'. One short-term tactic for combating political impunity could be the revival of a domestic version of the type of human rights monitoring and observation carried out by international groups, including MICIVIH, in the early 1990s. Representatives of civic organizations could accompany personalities considered at particular risk because of their views or political affiliation, as a deterrent to attack.

## **V. Key Conclusions**

Haiti's current crisis demonstrates that there must be change at the level of inter-sectoral relations in the country before the formal processes of democracy can be stabilized. The mere existence of such processes does not guarantee the success of democracy. Such a change in inter-sectoral relations can be brought about by means of dialogue, as happened in Guatemala and as is being proposed by some for Haiti, or it can be externally enforced, as is the case in Bosnia-Herzegovina. However, without this change, the results of elections and other apparently democratic outcomes will not enjoy legitimacy with those sectors that feel threatened.

The Haiti case provides some specific pointers towards how the international community can foster appropriate inter-sectoral relations in a society in order to stabilize the formal processes of democracy:

- **First**, while the primary political factions clearly need to be an important focus of efforts to build and sustain peace in any society, they cannot be the only focus. Such a focus needs to be embedded in a broader process of dialogue and consultation with representatives of different social sectors, so as to generate a consensus on policy parameters that is not easily shaken by short-term calculations of the primary factions.
- **Second**, no post-conflict society can deliver immediately on the high expectations that its members may have of democratic government. As attempts are made to stabilize the situation, crises of “social patience” may disrupt the fragile peace. In this context, in addition to ensuring that the most elementary needs of the population are satisfied, local and international authorities should also ensure maximum participation by civic and community representatives in the development and implementation of initiatives designed for their benefit. This participation will not only engender a sense of forward momentum and hope, thereby alleviating some of the crisis of “social patience,” but also create a sounder basis for democracy by encouraging local organization centered on such participation.
- **Third**, the rule of law, and the availability of security and justice for the common person, are clearly important determinants of the degree to which democracy can emerge and be stabilized in a post-conflict situation. Should political factions continue to dominate the political discourse through fear and impunity, then politics will be deadlocked along the lines of their often contradictory interests. The emergence of other voices, however, will open new spaces for compromise. Hence, the establishment of the rule of law, including through interim means such as community policing and alternate dispute resolution, should be a top priority for international and local actors.
- **Fourth**, the type of economic strategy in a post-conflict situation that may support the emergence of viable local political processes may not often coincide with conventional understandings of sound strategies. The demands of fiscal discipline, and rapid inflows and outflows of capital, may generate stresses and competition of the type that immature political systems are unable to handle. On the other hand, development schemes that are not-initially capital intensive but centered on providing the simple means (title, credit, etc.) through which common persons can engage in entrepreneurial activity may generate greater longer-term wherewithal for political stability. Persons engaged in sound productive activity may be less susceptible to the short-term blandishments of various factions.
- **Fifth**, international efforts should take into account the possibility of significant variation between local and international understandings of the factors that may lead to sustainable peace, both before and after conflict. In local understandings of these matters have emerged through

open and participatory processes (as has happened on several occasions during recent years in Haiti), or reflect agreement between key sectors, then they should be honored, even if they differ from preferred international courses of action. Only through a genuine process of interaction and learning will the key local actors appreciate the finer elements of democratic participation.

- ***Sixth***, the ideological polarization generated by extended periods of conflict can significantly erode the ability of key actors in a society to bargain concretely around specific policy issues. Great emphasis should be placed on reviving or strengthening this ability.

These arguments also point towards a different road-map for conceptualizing and implementing external actions, including those by the United States, creating and sustaining peace in societies ridden by conflict:

***Viable political processes are central to peace:***

While countries may have had long-standing economic, social, or environmental problems that could raise the level of internal tension, the actual eruption of mass violence is contingent on the extent to which existing political processes can manage these tensions. Hence, the key to creating or sustaining peace within a country lies not with economic or humanitarian assistance, but with reviving or strengthening political processes that can successfully manage current and future tensions. In the absence of such processes, other kinds of international assistance may even increase the levels of conflict.

***Fostering peace is conducive to long-term US national security:***

Usually, when mass violence erupts in vulnerable countries, it does not directly threaten US national interests. Even when there is a threat, it may only be brief. However, given the increasingly porous nature of national boundaries, such violence may occasionally lead to longer-term threats. Haiti sent waves of refugees to US shores in the 1990s; now it is one of the most significant points of transshipment of drugs into the United States. Similarly, the failure of interested parties, including the US, to support a viable political process in Afghanistan in the 1990s has now created a significant threat for international peace and security. It is quite likely that in the absence of muscular US-led intervention in Bosnia and Kosovo in 1995 and 1999 respectively, the region would now face greater political instability from radicalized minorities on the one hand, and outlaw regimes on the other. Hence, across the board, it is in US interest to support the revival of viable political processes in countries torn by violent conflict. However, to the extent that such conflict is only likely to threaten US security on an uneven basis, this support can be of a very specific and focused nature, rather than open-ended “nation-building” that many policy makers fear.

***External interventions should focus on reviving participatory political processes and the rule of law:***

Such focused and specific assistance should involve two components: *first*, the re-establishment of rule of law, and basic security, in a manner that allows open political activity to resume and viable political processes to emerge; *second*, the rapid identification, through dialogue among all relevant parties, of a common consensus on the parameters of a truly participatory and resilient political process. It is critical that this common consensus should be based not just on the views of the leaders of the parties to conflict, but also of representatives of civic organizations and key social sectors such as religious groups (accords signed between leaders are often based on tactical considerations, and rarely represent lasting and deep-seated consensus on their own). It is also critical that these two components precede the holding of internationally-sponsored elections, otherwise the continuation of intimidation and the absence of deep-seated political consensus will lead to an affirmation of the fault-lines of conflict through the electoral exercise (as happened in Bosnia in 1996). These components should also precede the provision of large-scale assistance for reconstruction. In the absence of a common understanding of the needs of the country, parties to conflict will resume fighting over the division of such assistance (as happened in Somalia, and as has happened in Haiti).

***Peace operations should support the building of political consensus and the restoration of rule of law:***

The plans for any international peace operation (whether it is characterized as “peacekeeping,” or “peacemaking,” or “monitoring”), and for its “exit strategy,” should be drawn up to focus on two components identified above. The civilian side of the operation should prioritize the building of the necessary political consensus. The military side should focus on the rapid restoration of the rule of law. Neither side will be able to carry out its task without active participation from all levels of indigenous leadership—from the national to the local. In this context, it should be noted that the local institutions that provide both genuine political participation and the rule of law may differ greatly from their Western counterparts. In Somalia and Afghanistan, for instance, local clan leaderships and tribal elders have traditionally provided both genuine and significant political participation as well as rule of law, and sustainable peace in both countries will require substantive engagement with these leaders.

***“Exit strategies” should center on the revival of local political processes:***

A tight focus on the facilitating political consensus, and on establishing the rule of law, will allow external actors to work within the frame of a definite and achievable “exit strategy.” The other aspects of reconstruction—economic, social, environmental, and so on—can be directly handled through negotiations between the newly revived and secure local political process on the one hand, and relevant international institutions such as the World Bank, the United Nations Environment Programme, or the UN Fund for Women on the other. These aspects need not be included within the parameters of a peace

operation, or any other type of time-bound intervention by external actors. The task of “nation-building” belongs fundamentally to the nations concerned. In this context, all indications to date are that the types of “transitional administrations” that have been established by international authorities in a number of countries in recent years, where external administrators run entire polities and economies, may stabilize the situation in the short term, but may not enable countries to stand on their feet in the long run.

***External interventions in internal conflicts should be based only on a common strategy:***

A focused international effort to support the emergence of a viable political process can only work if all concerned external actors operate within the framework a common strategy. It could be disruptive, for instance, if a large sum of money were made available for reconstruction by one international institution at the same time as another international institution is attempting to facilitate a consensus on the nature of the political process. The parties to conflict, instead of focusing on the long term, may turn their attention to squabbling over how best to use the money, without first having developed the political capacity to make such decisions on their own. If international actors then step in and resolve the dispute by imposing a solution, they could undermine the long-term viability of the country’s political process, and also add years to their “exit strategy.” Hence, a common strategy is critical for international actors. However, while most actors appreciate the importance of coordination, no one ever submits to the imposition of such coordination. Most attempts at mutual coordination rarely amount to being more than a degree of information-sharing. Under these circumstances, the mapping of a common strategy could be greatly enhanced through the nomination of an authoritative and credible facilitator—a high representative of the international community—for each instance of violent conflict, whose primary task will be to ensure that key actors adjust the timing and extent of their interventions to allow the emergence of rule of law and viable political processes prior to the provision of other types of assistance. For instance, the US may wish to propose in the near future the nomination of such a facilitator, preferably a credible international diplomat with strong standing in the Islamic world, for the task of ensuring coordinated international support for a viable political process in Afghanistan.

***External interventions should draw upon knowledge of a country’s political evolution:***

A key ingredient of any planning aimed at ensuring sustainable peace in a society is a thorough knowledge of the large-scale political evolution of that society through the course of history, and of the factors that have driven this evolution. This knowledge need not be of the detailed scholarly variety that focuses on sociological or anthropological minutia, but nevertheless needs to be thorough and grounded in experience gleaned from previous international work in the relevant countries. One of the key tasks of the international facilitator proposed above could be to ensure that relevant international actors have

direct access to the collective wisdom of researchers and experts that may have focused on particular countries. Students of Haiti, for instance, have long known that the very circumstances under which the country became independent, as well as subsequent developments, have created a severe social chasm within that country that has constantly derailed its politics. An international strategy for intervention in Haiti should have been premised, therefore, not on the immediate revival of its dysfunctional institutions, no matter how democratic they appeared, but on creating the prior political consensus across social groups that may have allowed these institutions to function more effectively. Similarly, experts on Afghanistan have long warned that the country's national life is the equivalent of the ethnography of Somalia mapped onto the geography of Scotland, and has never supported more than the most fragmented or tenuous of polities. Any attempt at "nation-building" in Afghanistan is, therefore, likely to come to quick and extreme grief.