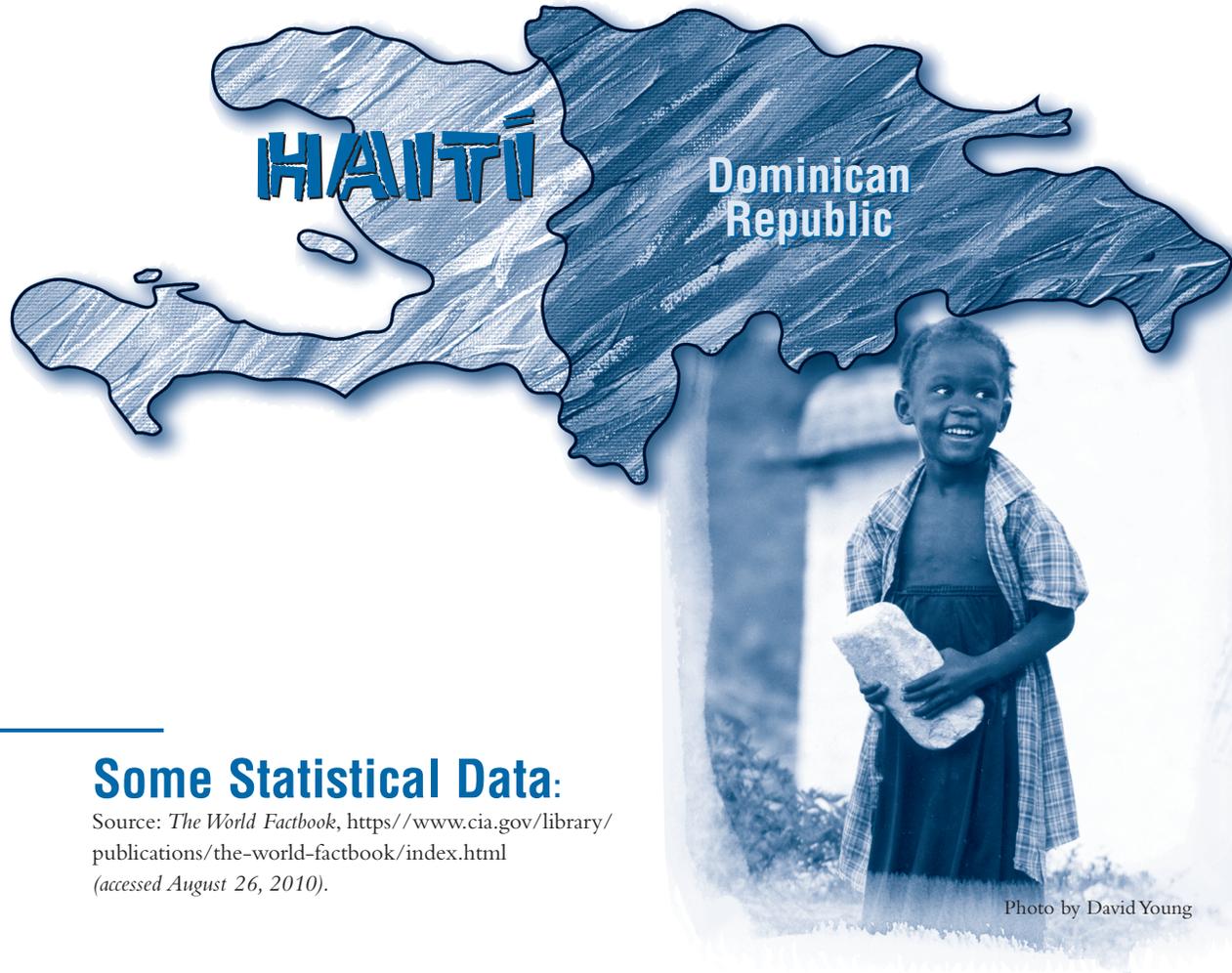


HAITI



Some Statistical Data:

Source: *The World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html>
(accessed August 26, 2010).

Photo by David Young

Human Development Index (HDI)*: 149 (of 182) UNDP 2009

Area: 10,714 Square miles (about the size of Maryland)

Population: 9,035,536 million **Below the age of 15:** 38.1%

Life expectancy at birth: (M) 59; (F) 62

Infant mortality: 60/1000 (2009) **Under five mortality rate:** 125/1000 (2009)

Adult literacy rate: 52.9% (2009)

GDP/capita: US\$1,300 (2009)

*HDI is an index established by the United Nations to measure the quality of life for the general population. It is based not only on economic indicators but also on factors like availability of education, health care, security, democracy, and human rights.

HISTORICAL NOTES

≡ **Rape of an island:** The Republic of Haiti shares with the Dominican Republic a mountainous Caribbean island that Christopher Columbus christened “Española,” or Hispaniola, in 1492. Arawaks and Caribs were the main ethnic groups inhabiting the island that they called Ayiti, Kiskeya, and Boiyo. The indigenous population was virtually exterminated by disease and abuse, reduced from about one million to 60,000 people by 1503 and to fewer than 500 survivors by 1548.



Photo by ACT Alliance

≡ **First Colony of the “New World”:** The island was Christopher Columbus’s first major stop in the region. While it became the first colony, it soon was neglected by the Spaniards as more gold and silver were found in central and southern America. After French pirates established refueling camps and hideouts on the western part of the island, there evolved a small French colony with more permanent French settlers. Spain formally ceded to France the western third of Hispaniola in 1697. Under the name “St. Domingue” it soon became the most prosperous colony in the New World, with its sugar, coffee, cocoa, indigo, and cotton produced by slave labor imported from Africa, particularly from the area now occupied by Benin, Togo, Nigeria, Ghana, and the Congo.

≡ **The slave revolt of 1791 and the creation of the nation of Haiti:** A general slave revolt in 1791 in the northern areas evolved into a liberation war that resulted in the abolition of slavery and the reunification of the island in 1801 under General Toussaint L’ouverture, a former slave. In 1802 France attempted to restore its hegemony by sending an elite expeditionary force. It was eventually crushed, and the former colony proclaimed its independence on January 1, 1804. This revolution has been considered the only successful slave revolution in modern history.

≡ **Recent political history:** The Republic of Haiti has known a turbulent history marked by numerous military dictatorships, political instability, and violence. This instability provided the pretext for a U.S. military occupation of the country between 1915 and 1934, purportedly to protect its economic interests. In recent

years, after almost thirty years of dictatorship under François and Jean-Claude Duvalier (1957–1986), Haiti again went through a series of ruthless and corrupt military rulers. In December 1990, free elections brought to the presidency a Catholic priest, Jean-Bertrand Aristide. But after only seven months in office, he was overthrown by the military in a bloody coup, during which 3,000–5,000 people were killed. After three years of international embargo, a blockade and a US-led international military intervention, the coup leaders eventually relented and Aristide was returned to office. In December 1995, new elections were organized and Mr. René Préval was elected president. After Préval served his 5-year presidential term, Aristide was reelected as president of Haiti in 2000. Eventually Aristide was ousted from his presidential office again in March 2004. After a nearly two-year intervention by international peacekeepers, Préval ran again as the *Lespwa* candidate in the February 2006 Haitian presidential election. René Préval was declared the winner after some ballot counting controversy. He was not sworn into office until May 14, 2006, following the Parliament being “seated.” Mr. Préval was elected for a five-year term.

≡ **Economic and environmental collapse:** Today, Haiti’s economy is in ruin, the result of years of mismanagement, the impact of the embargo and blockade of 1994, and trade policies that allowed foreign subsidized food to undercut the livelihoods of Haitian farmers. Local food production has declined while unemployment runs above 70 percent. Poverty has grown deeper for the majority even as commodity prices have increased. This statistic has reached record level due to political crisis and the almost complete departure of all foreign investments in Haiti. Several factors threaten the country with environmental collapse—in the countryside, deforestation, land erosion, and lack of fertility; and in the cities, overpopulation, unsanitary conditions, and widespread pollution.

≡ **Lack of effective national institutions:** The chaos of the post-Duvalier period has severely affected all state institutions. The national education and health care systems are in shambles, lacking infrastructure as well as trained and qualified personnel. The judicial system itself is paralyzed, not for want of laws but for lack of effective law enforcement structures. After the restoration of Aristide, the Haitian military was eliminated and a new police force was trained under UN peacekeeping troops that have been the acting security since 2004 to maintain law and order. The January 2010 earthquake left many of the education, medical, and government buildings in ruin, further exacerbating an already weak governmental infrastructure.



CULTURE AND RELIGIONS IN HAITI

Throughout its history, Haiti has sought to express its solidarity with other Latin American peoples struggling for independence. The continuous movement of populations across the Haitian/Dominican border—although a cause of constant friction between the two governments—has resulted in a symbiotic mix of the two peoples and enhanced their unique Latin American character. Haitian Creole, the national language of Haiti, combines a vocabulary from seventeenth-century French, Spanish, and indigenous languages, with West African syntax and dialects. Haiti is most renowned for its visual arts, especially its paintings. Vibrant colors and designs with scenes of daily life tell the story of a people who have never given up their faith in life and in God.



HAITI'S TRADITIONAL RELIGION: VODOU

Haiti's traditional religion, Vodou, is often confused with black magic (Voodoo). For anthropologists, it is a syncretism of numerous African traditional agrarian religions and of French and Spanish Catholicism that came together in the crucible of the colonial period. Vodou combines beliefs and rituals rooted in Benin, Togo, Nigeria, Ghana, and Congo—where most Africans imported by the French of that period came from—blended together and combined with Catholic iconography. Haitian Vodou was born and evolved in a context of oppression. During the colonial era, the French administration of St. Domingue made it illegal for slaves to gather and worship their African gods. Vodou was then practiced clandestinely. Even after the independence of Haiti, practitioners of Vodou were persecuted by the zeal of the Catholic church and its government allies.

Under the Duvaliers' dictatorship in the 1960s and thereafter, Vodou came out of hiding and assumed a more direct and public role. At the same time, the dictatorship used its evil twin (Voodoo) to terrorize and subjugate the population. Vodou was recognized as an official religion in April 2003. There is also a recognized National Association of Vodou Priests (Houngan) in Haiti, and Vodou is gradually losing its clandestine, covert, and magical character to become a more mainline, open, and legitimate expression of spirituality and religiosity.



Photo by David Young

In Vodou there is one god, the Great Master, who is the creator of the whole universe. Under this “Great Master” reign a multitude of small gods (Loas) that provide a link between him and the temporal realm where human beings exist. These Loas are intercessors, seen in much the same way as the Catholic church sees the saints. In effect, Haitian Vodou Loas are represented by Catholic images and statuary of saints. They are also represented by incantational images called “Vêvê,” which are esoteric drawings that incorporate various symbols and magical signs characteristic of each Loa. True to their African roots, Vodou rituals give an important place to ancestor worship.

The coexistence of Vodou and Christianity in the context of Haiti as a whole and within the minds of many Haitians accounts for the conflictual character found in many, torn apart between the rational, the spiritual, and the magical. Together with the Creole language, Haitian Vodou is one of the defining characteristics of Haitian culture.



THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN HAITI

Catholicism is currently the religion of about 90 percent of Haitians. Historically it has been accused of being a church closely associated with the Haitian mulatto elite educated in religious schools. When François Duvalier came to power in 1957, he quickly launched an offensive against this elitist church and its foreign missionaries. By 1963 most of them had been expelled from the country. In 1966, a new concordat was signed providing for the active training and deployment of Haitian clergy. In the 1970s numerous Catholic lay training centers were opened throughout the countryside to teach literacy, leadership skills, social awareness, community organizing, and improved agricultural techniques. Through this effort the Catholic church broadened its social base to include poorer sectors of the population.

This trend continued in the early eighties with base ecclesial communities (“Ti Legliz”) organized within most parishes. People gathered in small groups to pray in one another’s homes and to support one another. Espousing the principles of Latin America’s liberation

theology, many young priests emerged as spokespersons for the poor and oppressed. One of them became increasingly popular for his denunciations of the exploitation of the poor, governmental corruption, arbitrary arrests, and abuses. His name was Jean-Bertrand Aristide. His speeches and sermons put him in direct conflict with the hierarchy of the church and with the government.

The Catholic church has experienced some deep divisions between social justice-minded clergy and more conservative elements of the hierarchy. Soon after the election of Jean-Bertrand Aristide as president in December 1990, a rift opened between the Church and the Haitian government. This rift climaxed in January 1991 when the Archbishop of Port-au-Prince in his New Year homily called for the people to rise up and overthrow Aristide. Later, when the military succeeded in ousting Aristide in a bloody coup, the Vatican became the only foreign state to recognize the military rulers.



THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.) & HAITI

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) relates on a church-to-church basis to the Église Épiscopale d’Haiti (Episcopal Diocese of Haiti). There are no indigenous Presbyterian churches in Haiti.

The Episcopal Diocese of Haiti was founded in 1861 by the Rev. James T. Holly, an African-American Episcopalian who had come to Haiti along with others fleeing slavery and the onset of civil war in the United States. Most died from typhoid and malaria. Rev. Holly survived with two of his children and was eventually successful in establishing the first parish in Port-au-Prince. His missionary work was eventually recognized by the American Episcopal Church, and he was consecrated the first bishop of the Haitian Episcopal Diocese in 1874. In 1911 the Haitian church became a missionary district of the American Episcopal Church, and an American bishop was appointed. Since 1971, although still a diocese of the U.S. Episcopal Church, the Episcopal Diocese of Haiti is headed by a Haitian bishop.



Photo by George McHenry

The cooperation between the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the Episcopal Diocese of Haiti started in 1969. The partnership has been meaningful for both churches. The main areas of cooperation have been in education, health, and development. The Episcopal Diocese of Haiti is recognized for its contribution to the health care system in that country. Historically, Hospital St. Croix provided quality care in the Léogâne area, about twenty-five miles south of Port-au-Prince. PC(USA) mission workers and groups have had decades of meaningful accompaniment in the services provided by the hospital. Hospital St. Croix experienced several years of administrative reorganization and financial difficulties in the early years of this century. The earthquake of January 2010 changed not only the landscape of Léogâne but the structure of Hospital St. Croix. Work to revitalize medical care in the Léogâne community that had begun in November 2008 with the institution of a governing board for the hospital took on a whole new direction, urgency, and energy.

St. Vincent School for Handicapped Children in Port-au-Prince was the only institution in the country that attended to educational and health needs of children with handicaps. The January 2010 earthquake destroyed the majority of the school and is part of the Episcopal Diocese of Haiti's master rebuilding plan.

On the Island of La Gonâve, the Bill Rice Clinic and health care program is supported by PC(USA) presbyteries as well as by World Mission of the General Assembly Mission Council. The Episcopal Diocese of Haiti and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), with the important support of the Medical Benevolence Foundation, are looking at new health service possibilities in other rural areas of the country.

An integral development program began a decade ago in the partnership of the two churches in the Cormier watershed of Haiti, near Léogâne. Thousands of trees have been planted to help protect the mountain slopes. Agricultural activities and educational programs help Haitians learn more appropriate techniques and better uses of the land.

St. Barnabas Agricultural School built in 1982 in the northern part of Haiti (Terrier Rouge) offers a two-year course for Haitians that teaches appropriate agricultural skills that will enhance their work on their own land.

Other Relationships: The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) relates programmatically to various other organizations, ranging from ecumenical bodies like

Service Chrétien d'Haiti to nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and grassroots groups such as Farmers' Movement of Papaye (MPP), and FONDAMA. They receive support in carrying out small-scale development efforts involving reforestation, grinding mills, seed banks, grain reserves, and revolving credit for small businesses.



Photo by Medical Benevolence Foundation

CURRENT KEY ISSUES

On January 12, 2010, at 21:53 UTC (4:53 PM local time), Haiti was struck by a magnitude 7.0 earthquake, the country's most severe earthquake in over 200 years. The epicenter of the quake was just outside the Haitian capital, near the city of Léogâne.

PREEEXISTING KEY ISSUES AND SITUATIONS

Environmental degradation, drought, deforestation, and decreasing soil fertility: Extensive destruction of the forest cover and poor agricultural practices have made semideserts of various parts of Haiti and are threatening the sustainability of the country's environment. The once-lush forests covering the lands and mountainous regions have been cut down for use as

fuel for cookstoves. This process has destroyed fertile farmland soils and contributed to desertification. Deforestation has resulted in periodic flooding, such as that which occurred in September 2004. In May 2004, flooding killed over 3,000 people on Haiti's southern border. Later that year, Tropical Storm Jeanne strafed the northern coast of Haiti near Gonaives, leaving over 3,000 people dead from flooding and mudslides.

In August and September of 2008, four hurricanes and one tropical storm tore through Haiti in a four-week period of time. Particularly hard hit were the Artibonite and Central Plateau areas. Dire living conditions were further compounded by high fuel and food prices and political unrest in April.

Economic deterioration, structural adjustment policies, increased cost of living, unemployment:

The implementation of austere economic adjustment policies has made life more difficult for the middle classes and for millions in the slums and in the countryside.

Degradation of the quality of life, insecurity, overpopulation, and lack of adequate educational and health services is particularly evident in Port-au-Prince. Built for a population of 50,000, Port-au-Prince now hosts over two million without adequate sanitary infrastructures, roads, electricity, or social services. The 2010 earthquake resulted in the deaths of over 250,000 people in overcrowded Port-au-Prince and the dislocation of many hundreds of thousands of others.



RAYS OF HOPE

There is hope in Haiti, found in numerous grassroots organizations and local development organizations. The Farmers' Movement of Papaye, which is now a nationwide movement, has effectively mobilized and organized the population around Hinche and the Central Plateau. It is providing leadership and a voice that it never had before on the national scene. Most local groups need technical, management, and governance training, as well as leadership development to encourage the emergence of new leaders.

There is also hope among Haitian churches, both Catholic and Protestant, which are also mobilized to address community and national problems. Hope may

be found in international solidarity with Haiti. This is manifested most effectively in the various international coalitions and networks that support development strategies for Haiti. Educational and fund-raising events in churches and universities in the United States, Canada, and Europe are being organized. Public policy advocacy campaigns to influence U.S. government policies toward Haiti are being set up by friends of Haiti.



SOME OF THE PROJECTS RECEIVING PC(USA) FUNDS IN HAITI

The Farmers' Movement of Papaye (MPP): Papaye is a rural community in the Central Plateau of Haiti near Hinche. This rich agricultural area has traditionally suffered from chronic neglect and exploitation from trade speculators and military rulers. In the seventies, farmers organized and set up the Farmers' Movement of Papaye (MPP). With the help of the Catholic church, they developed programs in agriculture, small credit, literacy, awareness building, management of small enterprises, reforestation, and soil conservation. During the time of the Aristide government, the model of MPP was duplicated everywhere, helping other communities to deal with their problems. The Presbyterian Hunger Program supports the work of MPP in reforestation, soil conservation, and the Road to Life Yard program to combat hunger.

The Comprehensive Development Project (CODEP)/ Haiti Fund Inc.: Cormier is a rural community located in the foothills of the La Selle mountain range about thirty miles southwest of Port-au-Prince. There, steep mountain slopes are cultivated, though people often have to hang on to ropes or reeds in order to access their plots. Deforestation and land erosion are leaving the soil barren and covered with deep scars. The organizers and trainers of CODEP work with people in these poor mountain communities, teaching them improved techniques for gardening, soil conservation, rainwater catchments, fish farming, and reforestation. A credit program helps individuals and families with small projects ranging from home improvements to trading. Another important part of the program assists rural schools in the area with teacher training and school meals.



WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- ▮ **Pray for Haiti.** Haitians believe in the power of prayer. And prayer works.
- ▮ **Put Haiti on the agenda** of the mission (or hunger, or peacemaking) committee of your congregation.
- ▮ **Educate members of your congregation** and particularly children in your church's Sunday school about Haiti.
- ▮ **Set aside funds** collected in 2-Cents-A-Meal/Cents-Ability events for development projects in Haiti.
- ▮ **Become an advocate** for justice, peace, and fair labor practices in Haiti. Join the Haiti Mission Network.
- ▮ **Write to your congresspersons** about current U.S. policies regarding Haiti.

EXTRA COMMITMENT OPPORTUNITIES (ECO) ACCOUNT NUMBERS

Hospital Sainte Croix	E343302
St. Vincent School for the Handicapped	E862627
Comprehensive Development Projects (CODEP) ...	E864603
Haiti Northern District Agricultural School (St. Barnabas).....	E343102
Vocational School, Cap Haitian	E047911
Mark Hare, Mission Co-worker	E200356
Pix Mahler, Mission Co-Worker.....	E200379
Facilitator for Haiti Response (new position).....	
Facilitator for Joining Hands Network (new position).....	E200482
Haiti Hunger	H000014
Disaster Relief, Haiti	DR000064

A PRAYER FROM HAITI

O God our father and mother in heaven, you are our master, the great Lord over us all. In your mercy do not give up on us yet. We beseech you, O Lord, although we have sinned against you, please do not abandon us. From the dark pits of jails where enemies of justice have dumped us to rot and die, we lift our eyes up to you, O God, our light, our ray of hope. Do not abandon us to tyrants, to ruthless rulers, and to bandits. Have mercy God, we are in your hands. You make the rain that falls on our crops and give us the sun that shines on our land. Yet, too often the rains do not come. The soil dries up and rocks show their teeth on our mountain slopes. Our gardens fail. We get hungry. Have mercy upon us.

We've been sucking the bitter milk of misery, oppression, humiliation for so long, please Papa, wake up to our suffering and deliver us from the evil that has taken hold of our lives.

We trust that the day will come when your will shall be done on this earth as it is in heaven. And on that day we know we will be free, we will be fed, and your justice will reign for us all.

Yet now, O great One, give us the strength to go through this day. Take our hand and lead us on. Because, although we are frail and weak, with you at our side we fear none. In the name of your Son Jesus Christ, who died so that we may be saved, we pray.

Amen.

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Photo by Ruth Farrell, Presbyterian Hunger Program