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## Two years after the earthquake – A hive of activity

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# Two years after

A people always on their feet. Full of hope and steadfast in their faith, the country resembles a hive of activity which has been kicked, but which recovers its activity time and time again. Natural catastrophes have come one after another. Corruption has not gone away. Not all promises of aid have been fulfilled. Nevertheless, the Haitian people retain their dignity, remain combative and refuse to become discouraged.



# the earthquake – A hive of activity

Franz Lichtlé CSSp

Last year I spent two weeks in Haiti. More than two years after the earthquake, I had imagined that on returning to this country where I had lived for thirteen years, I would find a ravaged country, a downtrodden people, children, women and men reduced to begging, in despair, discouraged, out of breath. Not at all. On the contrary, during my fifteen days in places particularly struck by various calamities, I found the same dignified, proud and forceful people I had left behind eleven years earlier.

In various conversations over those fifteen days, most of the talk dealt with topics such as dignity, responsibility, taking charge, reconstruction, projects, justice, human rights, mutual respect and fraternity. Yes, their needs were many, along with many urgent repairs to the damage done by the earthquake and the subsequent cyclone, Anne, a few months later, not to mention the cholera transmitted by foreign troops.

Sent as a backup to a country devastated by these scourges, the troops brought with them the scourge of cholera that claimed thousands of victims. It continues to haunt people's memories and to reappear here and there without warning.

Many questions were asked time and time again in the course of our discussions. Why? How? But the Haitian hunger to live enabled them to get over such issues. It showed itself in their energy to get involved in a welter of activities here, there and everywhere,

## Reconstructing itself once more

Haiti resembles an ant heap that, if you kick it from time to time, still gets back to work — although in an apparently disordered manner. Things get moving all over the place, all geared to repairing, reordering, restoring, reorganizing. This country reconstructs itself to enable everyone to engage again



## Haiti

in an activity that will keep them going until the next kick in the teeth — like storm Isaac last August and hurricane Sandy last October.

In the United States they re-established the New York stock exchange much more rapidly than the several months and years it will take to rebuild the roads and bridges swept away by the rains in the south of Haiti or in the Grand-Anse. Every kick leaves behind its imprint for up to ten years — as if to engrave in people's memories the stops and starts of their history.

Claims pile up as people demand to be the first beneficiaries of aid — often clumsily and unjustly distributed. This aid is available and visible in different ways, but is also aligned to its counterpart: corruption.

### The Haitian people

But what sticks out a mile is the ingenuity of the people, often considered illiterate: their skill at getting out of a difficult situation, not always by means we would consider the best means, not always according to the western way of thought,

but with determination and faith in the future. That's where you discover the greatness of this people who have fought for centuries — not always successfully — but which is inscribed in their deepest identity as Haitians.

Haitian men and women value remaining in charge of their own destiny — even if that costs them dearly. Yes, we must be critical of their governments, of their political, economic and social structures that often fall short of their primary duty to serve, enhance, encourage, teach and care for their people. On one hand, the task is beyond them; on the other hand,



ambitions and thirst for power and money have not disappeared along with all their natural cataclysms.

It's not the great promises, more or less adhered by one and all, "*pays amis*" — a country of friends, including its present leaders — that have given back to Haiti its dignity. Mutual help, small and large, has allowed one and all to attend to their basic needs and to overcome the crisis that continues to hold sway in this small country.

They appreciate overseas help and hope that we continue to sustain them one way or another. Their surprising faith,

their hope in God and their confidence in his grace and his promises can upset and disorient us, but their sense of being in God's hands can inspire our prayers.

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They ask us to speak about Haiti, not as a beaten country, destroyed, unhappy and condemned, but as a country undergoing reconstruction, getting back on its own two feet, drawing from the depth of its inner being — from its history and its imagination — an extraordinary power which enables it to exist and to be one of the worthy and respected countries of our planet.

Haiti is beautiful. Haiti is praiseworthy. Haiti is great. ■

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Article and photos courtesy of *Pentecôte sur le Monde*.

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