# **Haiti Devastated by Major Earthquake**

**This shantytown housing in Port-au-Prince collapsed in the magnitude-7.0 earthquake that struck 15 kilometers from the Haitian capital on Tuesday.**

**A magnitude-7.0 earthquake struck Haiti at 4:53 p.m. EST on Tuesday, causing widespread damage. The earthquake occurred approximately 15 kilometers southwest of the densely populated capital, Port-au-Prince.** [**Early reports indicate severe devastation**](http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/cb_haiti_earthquake)**. The quake is the largest ever measured in Haiti and yet another of a series of disasters to afflict the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere.**

**“It is a very significant earthquake,” says Dale Grant, a geophysicist for the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) National Earthquake Information Center in Golden, Colo. Contributing to the expected damage, Grant says, is the fact that the earthquake struck less than 10 kilometers beneath the surface. Multiple aftershocks measuring up to magnitude 5.9 continue to strike the island nation.**

**With communications disrupted, no casualty numbers are yet available, but a photographer for the Associated Press reported a hospital collapsing in the Petionville district of Port-au-Prince. According to AP, the Haitian president’s chief-of-staff, Fritz Longchamp, says “buildings are crumbling right and left” near the national palace and the palace and government buildings are damaged. Another report says that a U.S. government official saw houses falling into a ravine. Other reports say the city went up in dust. The Haitian ambassador to the United States is calling the quake a “major catastrophe.”**

**U.S. President Barack Obama has mobilized relief efforts: The State Department, the U.S. Agency for International Development and U.S. Southern Command started coordination efforts in the hours following the quake.**

**The dearth of news so far is not a good sign, experts say. “As I sit at my computer, trying to learn more about the earthquake, the alerts of magnitude-5-plus aftershocks every 20 minutes or so keep coming in,” says** [**Mary Lou Zoback, vice president for Earthquake Risk Applications with Risk Management Solutions in Newark, Calif**](http://www.earthmagazine.com/earth/article/2c9-7d9-c-b)**. “We are all desperate for more information and fear what the paucity of information and communication implies about the scale of the catastrophe. Surely the nearly continuous jolts of aftershocks are making the nighttime rescue efforts a nightmare.”**

**Haiti is a seismically active area. The island nation sits at the border of the North American and Caribbean plates. There are two major strike-slip faults: the Septentrional fault zone across northern Haiti and the Enriquillo-Plantain Garden fault system, which runs across southern Haiti. According to USGS, the earthquake seems to have struck along the Enriquillo-Plantain Garden fault system. Earthquakes there “are quite common, but nothing of this magnitude,” Grant says. “This is the largest quake in this area. In 1751 and 1770 there were two very significant quakes, but back then, there were no seismic instruments, so they can only estimate the magnitude.”**

**Haiti is not prepared for this kind of devastation. Millions of people live in flimsy self-constructed shanty homes, stacked up along steep hills, Zoback says. That kind of infrastructure is very vulnerable; it collapses in the kind of earthquakes that just struck, she says. “This substandard construction cannot stand up to the frequent hurricanes, landslides and earthquakes that strike so many capital cities in Latin America, including Port-au-Prince.”**

**Although the situation in Haiti is only just developing, the disaster was exacerbated by the fact that the earthquake struck so close to the urban center — the greater Port-au-Prince area has about 2 million to 2.5 million people, at least 1.9 million of whom were likely exposed to violent shaking,** [**according to USGS**](http://earthquake.usgs.gov/earthquakes/)**’**[**shakemap system PAGER**](http://earthquake.usgs.gov/earthquakes/pager/)**, says David Applegate, the Senior Science Advisor for Earthquake & Geologic Hazards at USGS in Reston, Va.**

**"It's just terribly sad," Applegate says. "I hate to see what the dawn will bring."**

**Another concern is how frequently we’re going to see this in future, Zoback says. In recent decades, “there has been a huge exodus from the countryside to the major cities, particularly in the developing world,” she says. “Most rural poor in developing countries head for a better life in the capital cities, which represent the main economic engine of the country.” In Haiti, a quarter to a third of the population lives in the capital area. And 80 percent of the entire country’s population lives under the poverty line, she says.**

**Estimates suggest that one-sixth of the world's population (about 1 billion people) lives in squatter cities, and by 2030, 2 billion people will live in shantytowns, she says. “This tragedy now being unveiled will doubtlessly be repeated over and over again. The natural disaster may vary, but the most vulnerable population and structures will remain very similar.”**

# **2. Voices: From Haiti to Japan: A tale of two disaster recoveries**

**A year ago this month, a** [**devastating earthquake and tsunami struck northern Japan**](http://www.earthmagazine.org/article/mag-89-quake-strikes-japan-tsunami-heads-hawaii)**. Two years and two months earlier, on Jan. 12, 2010, a much smaller** [**earthquake devastated Haiti**](http://www.earthmagazine.org/article/haiti-devastated-major-earthquake)**. Both earthquakes occurred on a weekday and in the afternoon, but there is very little else that is similar about these two events or how the countries have recovered. Both offer reminders about the** [**uncertainties of the effects of disasters**](http://www.earthmagazine.org/article/voices-confounding-economics-natural-disasters)**.**

**Firstly, the geology of the two quakes is different. The Tohoku event was far larger, at magnitude-9.0. It occurred on a** [**thrust fault at a subduction zone**](http://www.earthmagazine.org/article/japans-megaquake-and-killer-tsunami-how-did-happen)**. The Haiti quake was magnitude-7.0 and is thought to have occurred on a set of** [**blind thrusts associated with a major strike-slip fault**](http://www.earthmagazine.org/article/blogging-earth-previously-unknown-fault-responsible-haiti-quake)**. One produced a tsunami; the other did not.**

**Secondly, both places seem to have been equally ill-prepared, but not for the same reasons. Japan is used to earthquakes and tsunamis but was not prepared for a tsunami of this magnitude. Wave heights reached 45 meters. The country was prepared, but perhaps not well-enough prepared. Although arguably no country could prepare for such an event.**

**In Haiti, the problem was one of utter lack of preparation, although it is hard to blame them. The** [**last comparable earthquake in Haiti**](http://www.earthmagazine.org/article/haitian-quake-no-shock-geologists) **occurred more than 200 years ago. In addition, the country is one of the poorest in the world. It is reasonable for the government to place earthquake preparedness low in its overall priorities, given the multitude of daily challenges that nation faces.**

**How does one compare damages and the “toll” of these earthquakes? Despite its smaller size, the death toll in Haiti was far greater than in Japan. The earthquake and tsunami in Japan killed between 15,800 and 20,000 people. In Haiti, the death toll remains quite uncertain. Initially put at 300,000 or more (greater than deaths from the Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004), the figure has been disputed and may be less than 100,000 — still a tragically large number.**

**The** [**long-term consequence**](http://www.earthmagazine.org/article/voices-should-science-dictate-whether-rebuild-after-natural-disaster) **of these disasters is where the story takes an interesting turn. It may surprise you, but there is no accepted theory for the macroeconomics of natural disaster shocks. Almost always, the absolute size of immediate losses will be much larger in wealthier countries than in poor ones. But does that mean that wealthier economies are hit harder than poorer ones?**

**It is hard to get good figures for Haiti, but the losses might be $7 billion to $14 billion, whereas in Japan, the number may be $300 billion. Obviously, the toll in Japan seems much worse. But it’s not: The losses in Haiti amount to perhaps twice the GDP there, whereas even the very high-end estimates in Japan suggest about 4 percent loss compared to GDP. The losses seem greater because Japan is so much wealthier — the world’s third-largest economy; Haiti is one of the world’s smallest. Because the Japanese economy is more than 500 times larger than the Haitian economy, it can withstand a bigger hit.**

**Not so for Haiti. The economy there has essentially no buffering capacity. There is almost nothing to “get going again” after the disaster. After two years, only 43 percent of the $4.59 billion promised in aid has been received and disbursed, according to the United Nations. Because of the perverse way economies are measured, Haiti may not look like its economy has suffered very much. It sounds callous (and it is), but if the economy was unconscious to start with, a disaster can’t make it more so.**

**Meanwhile, Japan is well on the way to recovery. It now looks like the anniversary date will be one on which the nation can celebrate a return to near normal. It took Toyota only six months to get back to 95 percent production. The dire warnings of economic collapse in Japan and a global ripple effect have proven unfounded. How can such a devastating natural disaster be dealt with so swiftly? The answer is twofold: Japan dodged a bullet — the disaster did not strike in a region that was key to its economy, but in a relatively isolated and largely rural region — and its economy, despite showing almost no growth for decades, is still large and has huge buffering capacity.**

## **3. Haiti “Reconstruction”: Luxury Hotels, Sweat Shops and Deregulation for the Foreign Corporate Elite**

By [Julie Lévesque](http://www.globalresearch.ca/author/julie-l-vesque)

**This article was first published on August 16, 2013. Today Haiti commemorates the 5th anniversary of the devastating earthquake.**

**“The international community is so screwed up they’re letting Haitians run Haiti.” –Luigi R. Einaudi, US career diplomat, member of the Council on Foreign Relations and former Assistant Secretary General at the Organization of American States**

**Haitian author and human rights attorney Ezili Dantò heard Luigi R. Einaudi make this shocking comment in 2004, as Haiti was about to celebrate its 200 years of independence with its first democratically elected President, Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Apart from his efforts to raise the minimum wage and other social measures for the majority of Haitians living in extreme poverty, Aristide planned to nationalize his country’s resources, a move which meant more money for Haitians and less for multinationals. One month later, in the name of the “international community”, Aristide was overthrown in a coup d’état orchestrated by the U.S., France and Canada.**

**Today, the “international community” is running Haiti again, colonial style.**

**One can easily tell by comparing the very slow construction of shelters and basic infrastructure for the Haitian majority with the rapid rise of luxury hotels for foreigners, sometimes with the help of aid funds which, we were told, were going to provide Haitians with basic necessities.**

**Most of the aid money went to donor countries’ businesses, government agencies and NGOs, as usual. International “aid” is a well-known capitalist scheme aimed at developing markets in the global south for businesses from the North. Of course this “aid” will benefit Haitians. But only the very few elite ones: those in power and the rich corporate elite. “Haiti’s open for business” and deluxe hotels will be welcoming businessmen so they can set up their sweat shops in a cool and luxurious environment.**

***“Several new luxury hotels in Haiti”***

**A year ago the Clinton-Bush Haiti Fund invested humanitarian aid money in a five star hotel, as some 500,000 Haitians were still in displaced camps**

**As part of the country’s “Reconstruction”, The Clinton-Bush Haiti Fund recently invested $2 million in the Royal Oasis Hotel, a deluxe structure to be built in a poverty-stricken metropolitan area “filled with displaced-persons camps housing hundreds of thousands”. (Julie Lévesque,** [**HAITI: Humanitarian Aid for Earthquake Victims Used to Build Five Star Hotels**](http://www.globalresearch.ca/haiti-humanitarian-aid-for-earthquake-victims-used-to-build-five-star-hotels/31646)**, Global Research, June 28, 2012)**

**Now, as 300,000 Haitians are still living in camps, a “new Marriott hotel rising from the rubble in Haiti is getting a $26.5 million financial boost” from the International Financial Corporation (IFC), member of the World Bank Group:**

**Marriott International and telecom giant Digicel broke ground on the hotel last year, and it is expected to open in 2015. It will be among several new luxury hotels in Haiti after the devastating Jan. 12, 2010 earthquake. Spain’s Occidental Hotels & Resort and U.S.-based Best Western have both opened hotels in the last six months in Petionville, a Port-au-Prince suburb. Spanish hotel chain NH Hotels also will open a new El Rancho in Petionville over the next few months.**

**IFC officials say the Marriott’s construction is expected to create about 300 jobs. The hotel itself will offer 200 permanent jobs. Marriott Hotels & Resorts will operate the hotel under a long-term management agreement.**

**The IFC currently has about $78.5 million worth of investments in Haiti, which continues to limp toward recovery more than three years after the quake nearly wiped out its economy. The investments are aimed at creating jobs, access to basic infrastructure, and income opportunities for Haitians, the IFC said.**

**“Haiti has the fundamental conditions for sustainable economic growth, including a competitive workforce, proximity to major markets, and unique cultural and tourist attractions,” said Ary Naim, IFC Representative for Haiti. “With our long-term financing support for this new and important piece of business infrastructure, we are confirming our commitment and confidence in Haiti’s future.” (Jacqueline Charles** [**New Marriott under construction in Haiti getting financial boost**](http://www.miamiherald.com/2013/07/03/3483742/new-marriott-under-construction.html)**, Miami Herald, July 3, 2013)**

**How a luxury hotel in a rich suburban area helps give the 300,000 displaced and most impoverished Haitians “access to basic infrastructure” has yet to be demonstrated. Moreover, it won’t create jobs for those who need it the most. It is very unlikely that a deluxe hotel in the plush suburb of Petionville will hire many poor, needy, often illiterate Haitians who only speak Creole to work for rich foreigners. These people are the “competitive work force” and end up in sweat shops and mines. What “competitive workforce” and “proximity to major markets” actually mean is “cheap labor for the U.S.”**

**On its web site the IFC says its investments are “focused on helping rebuild Haiti and reactivate growth through investment and advisory services, in priority sectors such as garment, infrastructure, telecom, tourism, and finance.” In addition to the $26.5 million for the Marriott, the IFC has invested $7.7 million to the aforementioned Oasis hotel, also located in Petionville. (**[**IFC Investment Generation in Haiti**](http://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/5da8eb004755e0449d53bf37b5ac3532/IC_Investment_Generation_Haiti_FEB11_EN.pdf?MOD=AJPERES)**)**

**In total, almost half of IFC investments have helped the construction of deluxe hotels in a rich suburb, home to the Haitian elite.**

**Slow Reconstruction, Slave Labor and the International Aid Deception**

**Unlike the fast-growing luxury hotel industry, the reconstruction efforts face many delays and various financial hurdles. Last June, a U.S.** [**Government Accountability Office (GAO) report**](http://foreignaffairs.house.gov/sites/republicans.foreignaffairs.house.gov/files/zkVt_d13558._Restricted.pdf) **criticised USAID for its lack of transparency, multiple delays, cost overruns and reduced goals. The report points to a striking paradox: although the sums allocated to sheltering have almost doubled, the number of houses to be built has been reduced by an astonishing 80 percent:**

**In 2010, just months after Haiti was struck by a devastating earthquake, the United States passed legislation allocating $651 million to USAID to support relief and reconstruction efforts. Three years later, just 31 percent of these funds have been spent as delays mount and goals are scaled back… The report also criticizes USAID for a lack of transparency…**

**The GAO found that inaccurate cost estimates and delays led to an increase in the amount dedicated to providing shelter from $59 million to $97 million while at the same time “decreased the projected number of houses to be built by over 80 percent, from 15,000 to 2,649.” Originally estimated to cost less than $10,000 for a completed house, actual costs have been greater than $33,000. USAID has awarded over $46 million to contractors for housing. Meanwhile, some 300,000 people remain in camps over three years after the earthquake. Overall, the humanitarian community has constructed just 7,000 new homes, about 40 percent of what is currently planned…**

**Displaced people dumped on a wasteland**

**While the tourism industry is rapidly growing, people have been evicted from the city and dumped on a wasteland in a camp called Corail-Cesselesse, also known as “Canaan,” “Jerusalem” and “ONAville”. The camp on the outskirts of Port-au-Prince could “become the country’s most expansive – and most expensive – slum” where there are no jobs and water is hard to find.**

**Today, all of the big agencies have abandoned the Corail camp and its 10,000 residents. Trumpeting their success and claiming to have prepared a “transition” to the local authorities, [International Organization of Migration] IOM, [American Refugee Committee] ARC and World Vision all pulled out (although World Vision still supports the Corail School, which it built). (**[**Reconstruction’s Massive Slum Will Cost “Hundreds Of Millions”**](http://haitigrassrootswatch.squarespace.com/haiti-grassroots-watch-engli/2013/6/17/reconstructions-massive-slum-will-cost-hundreds-of-millions.html) **Reconstruction’s Massive Slum Will Cost “Hundreds Of Millions” Haiti Grassroots Watch, June 17, 2013)**

**The international community is not helping rebuild Haiti. It is improving colonialism in Haiti with its companies, using the country’s population as slave labor to boost profits. The startling difference between the slow reconstruction efforts for Haitians as opposed to the rapid rise of the luxury hotel industry shows that in Haiti, the foreigners come first. Sadly white supremacy and slavery are still alive and well in the “pearl of the Antilles”.**

**Questions for Articles**

**Describe the magnitude of both these events.**

**a) what was the loss in dollars for these events? Why is this not a good measure of comparison for the severity of natural disasters?**

**Describe the loss of life for both of these events.**

**Using evidence from the articles and class, comment on the following statement in at least a half page response.**

**“Natural disasters have a more drastic effect on poorer, less developed countries than they do on richer, more developed countries”**

**5. After reading the article “Haiti Reconstruction”...” To what extent has the rebuilding of Haiti been unsuccessful? Use analytical response**

**6. To what extent have corporations taken advantage of the disaster for their own profits? Use analytical response**

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