

Haiti Emergency Relief Fund

November 15, 2006

Dear Friends of Haiti,

The Haiti Emergency Relief Fund was established in response to the U.S. -orchestrated coup d' État of February 29, 2004, in which the constitutional government of Haiti, led by President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, was violently overthrown. The Relief Fund offers humanitarian relief to Haitian grassroots organizations and activists who were directly impacted by the violence of the coup. We help sustain these community organizers and victims of repression as they attempt to rebuild their lives and continue their political organizing.

In February 2006, the Haitian people showed their determination to return Haiti to sovereign and democratic rule by electing Mr. René Préval as their president. A powerful grass roots mobilization managed to thwart the plans of the Haitian elite to steal the election and place one of their own in power. Mr. Préval's election produced a ray of hope in the midst of the nightmare produced by the coup. But it does not change the reality that Haiti remains under foreign occupation and that the same forces that staged the coup still retain enormous power.

Serving notice that the popular movement in Haiti remains strong, hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets in Port-au-Prince and other Haitian cities on July 15, 2006, President Aristide's 53rd birthday. They demanded the release of all political prisoners, the return of President Aristide to Haiti, and the rehiring of thousands of state employees fired during the coup. Thousands more demonstrated on September 30th, 2006, the 15th anniversary of the first coup against President Aristide in 1991. Clearly, the struggle for democracy in Haiti continues – as does the need for our support and solidarity.

Since its inception in March 2004, the Haiti Emergency Relief Fund has given concrete aid to the people of Haiti as they attempted to survive the brutal coup and rebuild shattered democratic institutions. We have raised over \$100,000 from foundations, individuals and activists in the United States and Canada. While this amount is small compared to the enormous assistance given by the United States, France and Canada to the coup regime, our work has had a significant impact. Here are some of the ways in which these funds have been used:

Victims Assistance Close to 10,000 people were killed during the coup, the vast majority victims of systematic state-sponsored political terror. Thousands more lost their homes and livelihoods. In addition, over 35,000 women were raped in the Port-au-Prince area during the first year and a half of the coup. According to an exhaustive study published in the British medical journal, *Lancet*, the vast majority of these rapes were committed by anti-Lavalas forces, including the Haitian national police and right-wing gangs working with the police.

HERF funds have supported grassroots activists who had to flee their homes and live as internal refugees. We have also contributed to defense of political prisoners and given much-needed financial support to their families. In addition, HERF has provided assistance to Haitian political refugees in the Caribbean and Central America.

Independent Human Rights Monitoring We have funded human rights workers and attorneys who continue, under dangerous conditions, to document human rights violations and defend victims of repression. These groups have been at the forefront of assisting victims of human rights violations since the coup in 1991. They have continued to provide material, psychological and legal assistance to victims of the 2004 coup.

Defending Trade Union Organizers HERF has assisted trade unionists whose labor organizing was violently attacked throughout the coup period. We have provided financial support for labor activists forced from their homes and their jobs due to repression.

Education/Literacy Since the coup, government subsidies for school children have been cut and many literacy projects have been terminated. HERF has provided funding for two important educational projects in this period: a school for poor children in Port-au-Prince, and an educational project in the rural areas of northern Haiti.

Hurricane Relief In the wake of Hurricane Ivan and Tropical Storm Jeanne, the coup regime refused to work with the community groups most able to funnel aid directly to the poor – those most affected by the storms. With extremely limited resources, HERF provided much-needed funds directly to grassroots organizations in the devastated areas.

Building International Awareness

HERF has provided travel money for Haitian activists to attend conferences in Brazil, Venezuela and in the Caribbean to report on the situation inside Haiti and build solidarity with progressive movements in those countries. With this support, leaders of grassroots women's organizations, trade union activists, and peasant organizers were able to counter the disinformation campaign conducted by supporters of the coup.

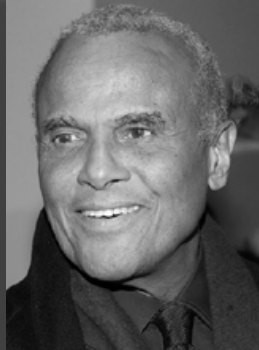
Now more than ever, these efforts need our support. The key to Haiti's future is the work of grass roots organizers – organizing in rural communities, in workplaces, in schools, among market women, in the poorest neighborhoods of Port-au-Prince and other cities. While the U.S., France and Canada attempt to curtail any progressive initiatives of the new Preval government, we can help promote and sustain human rights workers, community-based activists and all those fighting for a new, truly democratic Haiti.

The democratic movement in Haiti is rich in human resources, but lacks the financial resources needed to sustain democratic initiatives. One concrete form of support is to help the Haiti Emergency Relief Fund. Administered by a board of Haiti solidarity activists and deeply connected to grassroots movements in Haiti, this fund has already provided important support for victims of repression and for the movement to restore democracy in Haiti. In a country in which many people live on less than a dollar a day, every dollar goes a long way.

"The people of Haiti hold a special place in the hearts of those of us who cherish freedom. Having battled back against a violent coup, they are once again reaching for a democratic and humane future. The Haiti Emergency Relief Fund has been at their side, providing sustenance and solidarity.

I urge you to support their efforts."

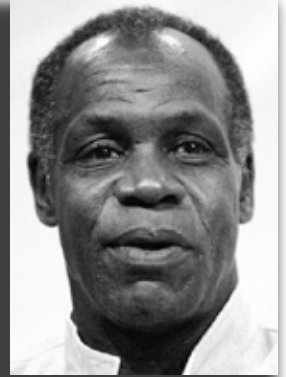
Harry Belafonte



"From the very first days of the brutal coup against the democratically elected government of Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the Haiti Emergency Relief Fund began raising funds to support those most affected by violent repression and terror. I am honored to be part of this effort anchored by the Vanguard Foundation. Now that Haitians — against all odds — are moving to rebuild democratic institutions, our support can have even more impact. This is a cause dear to my heart.

Please give what you can."

Danny Glover



Please give generously. Our dollars can do so much.

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Sincerely,

Walter Riley

Civil rights attorney, Chair of the Haiti Emergency Relief Fund,
Co-Chair of the Board of the Vanguard Public Foundation

Sister Maureen Duignan, O.S.F.

Co-Chair, Haiti Emergency Relief Fund