

Haiti: Phase II

Thomas P. Melady | Jan. 20, 2010



The Cathedral of Our Lady of the Assumption in Port-au-Prince Jan. 14. (CNS photo/Kena Betancur, Reuters)

Forty-eight years ago my wife Margaret and I were in Port-Au-Prince on our honeymoon. It was the first week of our marriage and we visited the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Assumption for God's blessings on our marriage. Almost five decades later, we are grateful for God's blessings.

Today, the cathedral is in ruins. The archbishop of Port-Au-Prince is dead. As many as 20 priests and seminarians are known to be dead as well. An estimated 200,000 people have died as a result of the Jan. 12 earthquake.

The world, led by the United States, is responding to this devastation of the capital as fast as circumstances permit.

Immediate emphasis has been on the need to save lives and bury the dead. While the current tragedy makes worst a chronic poor situation in Haiti. There will be a future! I wish to concentrate on Haiti: Phase II.

The country is slightly smaller than the state of Maryland, with a population of around 9 million people. In the past, the United States has been the principal source of foreign assistance. But this U.S. administered assistance was never able to lift Haiti out of the classification of the poorest nation in the western hemisphere.

As I discussed in my book, *Development: Lessons for the Future*, we should, after the recovery, turn to the leadership of the country and urge them to develop their own plan for economic growth. When we have their plan, we will also have their commitment. The United States and other funding sources should then assist the Haitian authored plan for recovery.

The world witnessed another type of tragedy in 1994 in the central-east African country of Rwanda. Around the same size as Haiti with a population of over 10 million, Rwanda, like Haiti, had the distinction of the time of its 1994 tragedy of being among the poorest countries in the world. Both countries are predominantly Catholic.

Following their recovery from the brutal genocide of 1994, the local Rwandan leadership initiated an expansionary fiscal policy to reduce poverty. The overall economic growth plan led by the president of the country, Paul Kagame, emphasizes significant improvement in education, an attractive investment climate and market-oriented reforms.

The first decade of this Rwandan economic development program has attracted foreign and U.S. financial aid.

In 2006 the United States recognized the significant improvement in the Rwandan situation by awarding it a Millennium Challenge grant.

The United States, the World Bank, and other lending authorities should, when the first phase of saving lives and restoring basic facilities is complete, invite the leadership of Haiti to submit their plan for economic transformation. Like Rwanda, the local leadership will respond with appreciation. In previous periods, the United States has informed Haiti and other developing countries on the type of aid they needed.

Fifty-two years ago I was with the U.S. Aid program in Ethiopia working on a U.S.-inspired program in development. It was the program that the United States decided was best for Ethiopia. I found little real Ethiopian commitment and it failed.

Once the Haitian leadership has its own plan, the United States, the World Bank, and other funding sources should be prepared to seriously consider backing the Haitian plan with the resources needed. With the United States and others backing the Haitian plan to transform their very poor nation to a level more in consonant with Catholic social teachings, there can be greater hope for success.

Our economic and military security over the decades to Haiti has amounted to almost a billion dollars. Now for the first time, we would be responding to their plan, which would more likely bring their commitment. Perhaps under these circumstances, and in another decade, we can reclassify Haiti and place this country in another more inspiring category.

[Dr. Melady, the former Ambassador to Burundi, Uganda, and the Holy See, is the author of *Development: Lessons for the Future*.]

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