

Haiti independence day

Looking at a new future a year after horrific earthquake

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CHARGE D'AFFAIRES A.I. OF HAITI

On Jan. 1, the Republic of Haiti celebrates the 207th anniversary of its independence from French colonizers. It is important to recall this historical rebellion, in which the world witnessed for the first time with great astonishment an army of former



slaves, black men brutally imported from Africa, breaking the chains of bondage by defeating one of the world's most powerful armies.

After gaining their freedom by "iron and fire," the former slaves of St. Domingue (the French part of Hispaniola Island) have established for more than two centuries in a very hostile environment the first free black-led state in the world. It is also important to recall and honor our heroes, such as Toussaint Louverture,

Jean-Jacques Dessalines and Alexandre Petion. Their legacy of courage and triumph over oppression was an example for every black man because of the freedom we came to enjoy.

On behalf of His Excellency President Rene Preval and the people of the Republic of Haiti, I would like to convey my deepest respect to Their Imperial Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko, Prime Minister Naoto Kan and his distinguished Cabinet. I would also like to express my utmost gratitude to the people of Japan for their friendship and generosity, and to thank them for all the assistance provided to our country following the terrible earthquake of Jan. 12, 2010, the most powerful ever to hit Haiti in a century, which devastated the Haitian capital and several neighboring cities.

According to estimates, this terrible 7.0 magnitude earthquake caused the deaths of 230,000 people, injured 450,000

more and has created more than 1.2 million homeless, in a country where 72 percent of the population are already living in a precarious condition. Hence, Jan. 12, 2010, will remain in our collective memory as the most painful day of our history.

A study by the Inter-American Development Bank estimated the total cost of the disaster to be between \$7.2 billion and \$13.2 billion. Jobs and trade are needed to break the cycle of poverty in Haiti.

Assessing the scope of the devastation, Prime Minister Jean Max Bellerive stated: "Parliament has collapsed, the tax office has collapsed, schools and universities have collapsed, and hospitals have collapsed." He further labeled the death toll "unimaginable."

As we celebrate and honor the first black republic in the history of mankind, let us not forget the victims of Jan. 12, 2010, the homeless, the general pain it has caused us and

the destruction to our substantial history.

This year, Haitian National Day is celebrated against the backdrop of the shocking quake. While the people of Haiti are mindful of their past, however, the moment is suitable for rejoicing. Certainly, 207 years of freedom

would have led us to a New Haiti, to the Haiti that all Haitians dream of, the beautiful Island that used to be called the "Pearl of the Antilles" (1804-1904).

It is unfortunate that after two centuries of independence, Haiti remains isolated. Its overall situation is

compounded by yearly natural disasters and now by cholera.

Despite that gloomy picture, Haiti is well known for its incredibly rich culture and artistic heritage. Though its art production was highly impacted by the quake, many talented and renowned artists have responded, and are responding to the disaster through music, arts and poetry. That means the Haitian people have great spirit and

resilience even in times of distress and adversity.

We remain confident that, with the help of the international community and the people of the world, we can rebuild the country and lay the foundations for a brighter future. With a well-oriented economic system managed with sound economic policies, better infrastructure and a more cohesive social system, we can restore the Pearl of the Antilles.

Congratulations
on the 207th Anniversary of the
Independence Day of the Republic of Haiti

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Aftermath: People search for survivors amid the rubble of the Caribbean Supermarket in the Delmas neighborhood on Jan. 12, 2010, in Port-au-Prince. FREDERIC DUPOUX / GETTY IMAGES



Symbol: The Haiti National Palace stands severely damaged on Jan. 12, 2010, in Port-au-Prince after a devastating earthquake struck. LISANDRO SUERO / GETTY IMAGES