

Prerequisite to Progress: The Importance of the 2010/2011 Elections to Haiti's Future

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Progress in the reconstruction of Haiti in the aftermath of the January 12, 2010, earthquake has been slow, but it is tangible. Impassable roads have been cleared, Haitians work to demolish buildings, often with hand tools, then pile the rubble and clear the site, and the famous Marché Hyppolite, the enormous 19th century market destroyed in the quake, was recently rebuilt. These physical signs of progress are heartening as they are a reminder that the work of renewal and reconstruction continues in spite of Haiti's political instability. To echo Secretary of State Hillary Clinton during her recent visit, this progress is a testament to the incredible resilience and determination of the Haitian people.

And yet for all the work being done, it is clear that sustainable progress needs a foundation of political stability, something that has been all too often missing. International and domestic investment will not take risks when it cannot predict Haiti's new leadership team for the next five years. Donors and investors in infrastructure projects need to know that the Haitian government will approve of and continue to support planned initiatives and development proposals. And because President René Préval and his administration are in lame-duck status, they are unlikely to make long-term decisions regarding Haiti's reconstruction.

As the commemorations of the one-year anniversary of the earthquake ended, I was reminded that it might have been an opportunity to demonstrate Haiti's new beginning—with the second round of elections originally scheduled for January 16. Following that calendar, Haiti would have inaugurated a new President by February 7, the Constitutionally-mandated date for a new administration.

However, January 2011 turned out to be yet another month of instability, as political parties and candidates squabbled over the flawed November 28, 2010 first-round elections, and there were growing calls to throw in the towel and start the elections process over again. Certainly the November 28 elections had significant problems, including voters who couldn't find their names on polling place lists as well as stuffed ballot boxes. However, there were also many places throughout the country where voting took place without significant problems. Our goal throughout has been to support the Haitian people's right to choose their leadership in a free and fair electoral process. Re-running the elections meant nothing more than kicking the can down the road, and we had little confidence this would result in improving the elections dynamic. We quickly realized the only option that made sense—and the only intellectually honest option—was to support the elections process. It is the fundamental right of the Haitian people to choose their own leader, and we were determined to support them completely.

Our support for a free and fair electoral process led us to publicly express concern regarding the Provisional Electoral Council's (CEP in French) announced preliminary results, which were inconsistent with the published results of the National Election Observation Council, a Haitian NGO that fielded 5,500 domestic observers on election day, as well as with the elections-day observations of numerous domestic and international observers. We supported President Préval's decision to ask the Organization of American States (OAS) to audit the first round results. The OAS, which had also monitored the first-round elections, issued a report detailing the validity of many allegations of voter fraud. The report detailed an audit of the vote which concluded that the CEP's preliminary results were incorrect and should be amended. The report was serious and credible, and for the United States and our international partners supporting the reconstruction of Haiti, it was clear that the OAS report represented a way to move the electoral process forward and ensure that the voice of the Haitian people was heard.

The decision to publicly question the CEP's decision in early December 2010 was not an easy one, but it was a necessary one for the United States. We not only contributed \$5 million to the UNDP-administered fund to hold the elections, but also \$9 million on grassroots political party training, international observers, and voting awareness campaigns to support elections that were free and fair. We owed it to the Haitian people, on whose behalf we support Haitian democracy, and the American taxpayers, who surely do not want their tax dollars spent on a corrupt election, to speak up and question the CEP's announcement. And it was also incumbent upon us to speak up sooner rather than allow questions to build regarding the credibility and authority of Haiti's next President. When the CEP amended its preliminary results and upheld the OAS report conclusions, the fact that the streets were calm in this restive nation spoke volumes regarding the OAS report's credibility and its acceptance by Haitian voters.

Following the CEP's announcement of definitive results from the first round, it announced a schedule for the second round of parliamentary and presidential elections. The second round took place March 20, definitive results will be announced in April, and by May it is my fervent hope that Haiti will achieve what we all are working for: the peaceful transition between democratically-elected President Préval and a successor chosen by the Haitian people in a free, fair, and transparent manner. We are pleased that initial reports of the second round election are positive, with Haitians and international observers noting improvements in the voting process.

For all the focus on the process of elections, we cannot forget why it is a matter of such importance, worthy of the substantial human and financial resources it has thus far received. A new government, elected democratically, means simply that Haiti arrives at the point where it can begin to confront the long list of challenges that the country faces. Among the issues that are waiting for a new President and legislature include extending dual-citizenship rights to the Haitian diaspora, judicial reform that updates Haiti's overwhelmed legal system, making long-delayed decisions on rebuilding Port-au-Prince, starting the process of constructing long-term housing for the internally displaced, and modernizing Haiti's commercial, land tenure, and investment codes.

Some of these priorities have seen forward progress. Dual citizenship for Haiti's diaspora and measures to improve Haiti's judiciary were considered during the last legislature, and need only be approved by the upcoming legislature. On the investment front, on January 11, the Haitian government, the Inter-American Development Bank, the Interim Haiti Recovery Commission, the US government, and Korean garment manufacturer Sae-A Trading announced a joint effort to construct an industrial park in Haiti's north. Anchored by Sae-A's \$75 million investment, which will create 20,000 full-time Haitian jobs in the first phase alone and make the company Haiti's largest private employer, and supported by US and IDB investments in the park's infrastructure, the industrial park will be able to support 65,000 permanent, full-time jobs, and will single-handedly increase the number of formal private sector jobs by 20 percent.

This represents just the first step in working with Haiti to ensure its long-term development, and Haiti will need much more private investment to realize the country's potential. Attracting investment to Haiti is the only way to create the jobs necessary to support the Haitian people and generate the revenue to support a more responsive and responsible Haitian government. Without investment in Haiti, all the excellent work that the international community will be doing in Haiti over the coming months risks being unsustainable. This is my third tour in Haiti, and throughout my 24 years of involvement with the country, I have seen the vicious circle of democratic instability and the subsequent withdrawal of private sector investment. However, there is reason to believe that this time could be different.

As we all witnessed in the hours and days following the earthquake, the world responded quickly, decisively, and compassionately in Haiti's time of darkest need, and over a year later, there is still an enormous reservoir of willingness to help rebuild Haiti better. The United States and the international community stand willing to help the Haitian people fulfill the promise of their potential. For all this to happen, however, Haiti needs the basic stability of a peaceful, credible, democratic transition. If the Haitian people can take this next step, it is not inconceivable that years from now, think tanks and universities will study the "Haitian miracle."