

Dear Colleagues,

Please find below the mainstream news on Haiti for December 12, 2006 – January 3, 2007.

Reuters and the BBC were the only msm to report on the December 22<sup>nd</sup> deadly attack by UN peacekeepers against Bois Neuf residents of Cité Soleil. Estimates of the dead vary, but range from at least nine to several dozen. The UN justified the attack as an anti-gang operation, but Cité Soleil residents told Reuters that MINUSTAH troops “came here to terrorize the population.” MINUSTAH showed its typical disregard for civilian casualties by announcing: “it's difficult for us to know for now how many bandits could have been killed or wounded.” The Haitian Red Cross coordinator in Cité Soleil denounced MINUSTAH for blocking Red Cross vehicles from entering Cité Soleil to treat the victims. AUHMOD, a Haitian human rights group, reports that at least one school was destroyed, and that the local hospital was overwhelmed with victims. The December 22<sup>nd</sup> attack is reminiscent of the July 6, 2005 massacre, when MINUSTAH troops killed dozens of civilians in an attack in Cité Soleil justified as an anti-gang measure.

Kidnapping reports, with increasingly deadly outcomes, dominated the news in mid December. A school bus hijacking resulting in seven abducted children was only one of four reported incidents involving 22 children kidnapped on one single day (December 13<sup>th</sup>). Parents of the seven reportedly paid ransoms securing the children's release. Children are reportedly being targeted “because they offered no resistance and their families were more likely to pay quickly, police said.” The Reuters report closed with the obvious: “UN peacekeepers have done little to reduce violence since they arrived in June 2004”. Ironically on the same day UN ‘peacekeepers’ were killing and injuring dozens in Cite Soleil, Jacqueline Charles of the Miami Herald's story focused instead on the gruesome kidnapping death of one young woman.

UN credibility in Haiti took another hit in Reed Lindsay's Washington Times report on 34 cases of reported sexual abuse and exploitation by members of the UN peacekeeping mission in Haiti over the past two years. Of the 34 investigated cases no cases of rape and only one case of sexual exploitation has been substantiated by the mission. Lindsay closes with the fact that globally, the UN “has investigated 319 peacekeepers for accusations of sexual abuse or exploitation, resulting in the repatriation of 144 military personnel, 17 police officers and 18 civilian officials” since January 2004. By the law of averages and most every statistic on reported sex crimes, at least 19 of Haiti's 34 cases should be substantiated.

The UN appealed for US\$98 million in assistance for Haiti for vague “economic recovery and help provide people with basic services.” This AP/International Herald Tribune piece closes with the common refrain “peacekeepers and Haitian police have been struggling to contain killings and kidnappings blamed on street gangs, some of which declare loyalty to Aristide.”

A South Florida Sun-Sentinel piece features an extensive story of how Haitian children are disproportionately affected by losing one or more parents to AIDS. The story mentions that now most Haitians suffering with AIDS have ready access to life extending drugs.

Johanna Mendelson-Forman, Senior Associate with the Center for Strategic and International Studies, authored an opinion piece for the Orlando Sentinel highlighting many positive developments offering real 'hope' for Haiti beyond the recently passed H.O.P.E. legislation favoring Haiti's manufacturing sector. However, she places unique emphasis on Haiti's potential to "become energy independent through the use of biomass energy." Her optimism is based on a World Bank study promoting growth of energy crops by Haiti's 70% rural population to develop an indigenous biofuels market, thus assisting the rural economy and environment. Most critically, Mendelson-Forman sees this as an opportunity to ultimately avert Haiti's slide towards state failure.

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### **1. At least nine killed in Haitian slum raid**

**Fri Dec 22, 2006**

**By Joseph Guyler Delva**

**Reuters**

<http://today.reuters.com/News/CrisesArticle.aspx?storyId=N22284926>

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (Reuters) - At least nine people were killed in Haiti's largest slum on Friday during a raid by security forces targeting armed gangs blamed for a recent surge in kidnappings and other crimes in the capital Port-au-Prince.

It was one of the worst outbreaks of violence in the chaotic Caribbean country in more than a year and came hours after the U.N. chief envoy to Haiti, Edmond Mulet, said the government had given the go-ahead for a crackdown on areas controlled by gangs.

About 400 U.N. soldiers in armored vehicles, backed by Haitian police forces, stormed a district called Bwa Nef in the volatile slum of Cite Soleil in a move to dislodge heavily armed gang members led by a young man known as Belony.

A Reuters photographer counted nine bodies from the clashes that ensued and eyewitnesses counted four others dead.

As many as 30 people were wounded, humanitarian aid workers said.

All of the casualties were believed to be civilians.

"The foreigners came shooting for hours without interruption and killed 10 people," Johnny Claircidor, a resident of Bwa Nef, told Reuters. "Then Belony's gang members started to exchange fire with them", he said. "I personally counted 10 bodies," Claircidor said.

The spokesperson for the U.N. peacekeeping mission in Haiti, Sophie De la Combe, declined to provide a toll.

"No one was killed or injured on our side, but it's difficult for us to know for now how many bandits could have been killed or wounded," said De la Combe.

The U.N. operation, conducted jointly with the Haitian police, was launched at about 3 a.m. and was led by Brazilian peacekeepers.

"The operation was conducted to address the current insecurity caused by the recent wave of kidnappings in the capital Port-au-Prince," said Jean Saint-Fleur, the director of Haiti's Administrative Police.

He too said he was unable to give an official death toll from the Cite Soleil fighting.

"They came here to terrorize the population," Rose Martel, a slum dweller, told Reuters, referring to the police and U.N. troops.

"I don't think they really killed the bandits, unless they consider all of us as bandits," she said.

## **2. Five die in Haiti slum violence**

**BBC News**

**December 22, 2006**

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/6205037.stm>

Opposition to the UN peacekeepers is growing amongst slum dwellers  
At least five people have been killed in clashes between UN troops and armed gang members in a Haitian shantytown near the capital, Port-au-Prince.

The UN mission said the confrontation began early on Friday morning, but were unable to comment on casualty figures.

They said a UN vehicle was also burnt in the clashes at the Cite Soleil slum.

UN peacekeepers - in Haiti since 2004 - have stepped up patrols amid worsening security in the area, but opposition to their presence has grown.

They were sent to maintain order after a revolt ousted the former President, Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

Gun battles

A UN statement said its troops had launched a joint operation with Haitian police as part of an effort to fight a recent upsurge in kidnapping and other violence by gangs based in the slum.

Eyewitnesses said several victims were taken to hospital, and local residents showed reporters the bodies of five men who, they said, were killed by UN fire.

Residents had previously accused UN soldiers of firing indiscriminately during gun battles with gang members.

The UN has denied this, saying peacekeepers only open fire when they come under attack.

The Brazilian-led UN force includes more than 8,000 soldiers and police supported by some 1,000 civilian personnel

### **3. 2 Hurt As Crowd, Police Clash in Haiti**

**The Guardian Unlimited**

**Thursday December 21, 2006**

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/worldlatest/story/0,-6294671,00.html>

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) - Two people were injured when an angry mob clashed with police Wednesday while officers tried to transfer two men suspected of attempting to kidnap a child, witnesses said.

The melee erupted when a crowd of several hundred people descended on the police station to demand the suspects be released so they could be lynched, witnesses said.

At least two men were wounded by gunfire when Haitian and U.N. police fired shots and tear gas to disperse the crowd, according to two Associated Press photographers at the scene. It was unclear who shot the men and their condition was not immediately known.

A U.N. vehicle was also set on fire and destroyed during the fracas.

Haitian police spokesman Frantz Lerebours said the two kidnapping suspects were later transferred to another jail and were being held for questioning.

Kidnappings are a major threat in the Haitian capital and both the U.N. and national police have recently launched operations in recent weeks intended to crack down on the problem.

#### **4. Gunmen in Haiti kidnap children, demand ransom**

**Thu 14 Dec 2006**

**By Joseph Guyler Delva**

**Reuters**

<http://today.reuters.com/News/CrisisArticle.aspx?storyId=NCE438726>

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti - Gunmen have abducted at least seven children in a suburb of Haiti's capital Port-au-Prince, the latest in a wave of kidnappings for ransom in the poor Caribbean nation, police said on Thursday.

"Now the kidnappers target children because they know the children are our hearts. They want to hit us in the heart so they can get the money more rapidly," said Fred Blaise, a spokesman for the United Nations police force in Haiti.

The captors demanded an undisclosed ransom for the children, and U.N. and Haitian police were attempting to negotiate their release.

"We are in communication with the bandits in order to secure the release of the children," Blaise said.

The children were kidnapped on Wednesday when their school bus was hijacked on its way to school in the suburb of Marin. Police did not disclose their exact number nor their ages but said they were in touch with the children's parents.

Residents joined police in a house-to-house search of the area on Thursday.

The rising number of kidnappings is threatening efforts to stabilize deeply impoverished Haiti two years after its previous president was driven into exile in a violent rebellion.

About 100 kidnappings for ransom were reported last month and at least 60 have occurred so far this month, including that of a 6-year-old boy in Port-au-Prince and murdered in the northern city of Cap Haitien.

Haiti enjoyed a brief lull in violence after President Rene Preval won elections in February. But crime is rising.

#### **5. Kidnappers free 7 Haiti kids, abduct others**

**December 15, 2006**

**Reuters**  
**CNN.com**

<http://today.reuters.com/News/CrisesArticle.aspx?storyId=N15371184>

Police say seven children freed after parents paid ransom to kidnappers

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti-- Kidnappers freed seven children snatched two days ago from a school bus in the Haitian capital, but several other children were abducted in the latest wave of kidnappings-for-ransom, police said Friday.

"The children were released on Thursday night. ... They are fine," said Henri Dossous, police commissioner in charge of the anti-kidnapping unit. "The ransom collected by the families was paid to the kidnappers."

No arrests were made in the case, and police would not reveal the amount of the ransom paid.

As many as seven other children were kidnapped in separate incidents Thursday, according to witnesses and local media. Police confirmed that several children had been abducted.

In a new twist to the rash of kidnappings that have plagued the impoverished Caribbean nation in recent weeks, children were being targeted because they offered no resistance and their families were more likely to pay quickly, police said.

The abduction of children appeared to have struck a nerve with Haitians. Residents of the capital helped police in door-to-door searches for the kidnap victims this week, and authorities reported a sharp rise in calls from the public with information on the case.

About 100 kidnappings for ransom were reported last month, and at least 60 have occurred so far this month, including that of a 6-year-old boy who was killed.

The kidnappings are still more bad news for Haiti nearly three years after then-President Jean-Bertrand Aristide was driven into exile by a violent rebellion.

U.N. peacekeepers have done little to reduce violence since they arrived in June 2004, although Haiti enjoyed a brief period of relative peace after President Rene Preval won elections in February.

## **6. Child kidnappings raise fears in Haiti**

**By Jacqueline Charles**  
**McClatchy Newspapers**  
**Miami Herald**  
**December 29, 2006**

MIAMI - The first time she called her daughter's cell phone, no one picked up. Then Maggy Dessources dialed the number again. This time, a man answered.

"Is this not Natacha's telephone?" she asked curiously.

"Yes, Madame," the man said. Dessources' heart sank.

"Natacha has a little problem," the man said, pausing after every word. "She has been kidnapped."

Dial tone.

In perpetually turbulent Haiti, where children already suffer high rates of illiteracy, child slavery and mortality, its most vulnerable citizens now face a growing danger: kidnappings.

They are being snatched while walking to or from school; hijacked while riding in school buses; abducted during home invasions; delivered to kidnappers by the family driver. And in the horrifying case of Natacha Farah Kerbie Dessources: shoved into a waiting car with five armed men as she pounded on the front gate of her house.

"I didn't think they were going to kill my child," Maggy Dessources said. In the end, she paid a ransom of \$500. But they did. Her bullet-riddled body was found near a heap of trash two days after she was kidnapped last month.

Haitian and international authorities can't say with certainty how many kidnappings have taken place in the recent past. Victims tend to avoid reporting abductions, they say, especially if they involve children.

But the Haiti director of the U.N. Children's Fund estimates that 48 youths have been kidnapped since November; a U.N. official familiar with the issue puts it at 60 since November; and a Port-au-Prince human rights organization says at least 68 children were abducted Nov. 10-Dec. 15.

"Given the state the country is in, the state of the insecurity, the state of the impunity, the state of kidnapping, the state of crimes in Haiti, we can't get lower than this," said Pierre Esperance, executive director of the Port-au-Prince-based National Human Rights Defense Network. "The government has an obligation to reinforce the key state institutions - justice and police."

At 20 years of age Natacha Dessources wasn't a child. But the student at a teacher's college in Port-au-Prince has become a poster child for Haiti's child-kidnapping phenomenon. Angry mourners at her funeral later protested before the National Palace, demanding that President Rene Preval do something about the kidnappings.

Maggy Dessources, who is unemployed, told the kidnappers in one of many phone calls while negotiating a ransom, that she had no money. After she dropped off what she managed to gather from begging family and friends, she was almost certain they would release the girl, like other kidnappers had done with so many other victims before.

When Natacha's body was found, her eyes had been gouged, and she'd been shot several times. Two of her fingers had been broken, her mother said in a telephone interview from Haiti, where she has been in hiding with her 15-year-old son.

Shortly afterward, police announced they had found the strangled body of 6-year-old Carl Rubens Francillon, kidnapped on Nov. 8 in Port-au-Prince. His family driver has been arrested. His parents also had paid a ransom.

On Dec. 13, kidnappers hijacked a school bus with seven children on their way to school. It was one of four kidnapping incidents that day involving 22 kids, officials say. All were released unharmed after their parents paid ransoms.

"Children are in a state of panic," said Adriano Gonzalez-Regueral, UNICEF's representative in Haiti. "They are having their childhoods destroyed by the situation right now. They are shaken. If they are being educated in fear, we can expect the future will not be so brilliant."

In a country where 49 percent of the 8.3 million people are under the age of 18, children already face daunting odds, according to UNICEF statistics: 1,000 are involved in armed gangs; 170,000 live in virtual slavery as household servants known as restavecs, and less than 50 percent attend school.

"They are more and more afraid to go to school," Gonzalez-Regueral said.

As a result of the child kidnappings, schools closed early for Christmas vacation and some frustrated Haitians have been calling for kidnappers to be shot on sight. Some lawmakers have proposed a return of the death penalty, now forbidden by the constitution.

But the child kidnappings may be more than simple if horrific crimes.

Both Gonzalez-Regueral and Esperance believe kidnappers are deliberately targeting kids to destabilize the government of Preval, elected in February after two years of rule by an interim government following the violent ouster of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

"The concentration of children being kidnapped implies a kind of coordination, of some kind of plan," Gonzalez-Regueral said.

Fred Blaise, spokesman for the foreign policemen deployed in Haiti as part of a U.N. peacekeeping force, said authorities have been unable to discern any pattern.

At the very least, the child kidnappings have highlighted the inability of the Haitian government and the 9,000-strong U.N. mission to control the country's daunting security problems - despite ongoing government efforts to negotiate with the armed gangs to demobilize and surrender their weapons.

"There needs to be a clear signal from the government they have divorced themselves from the people who are terrorizing the population," said Esperance. "There has to be a message they are going to reinforce the police and justice."

Case in point: A report by Esperance's group shows that only 20 kidnappers have been tried and sentenced in two years. The longest sentence: 10 years, despite a decree by the U.S.-backed interim government that kidnappers and accomplices are to be given life behind bars.

"There has to be a cleaning inside the justice system," said Esperance, accusing Haiti's dysfunctional and often corrupt judiciary of allowing the problem to grow.

Haitian and U.N. police say they are making progress with an anti-kidnapping operation they launched earlier this month, going after the perpetrators in their hangouts. So far, there have been 25 arrests.

"We've tried to stop reading their minds on why they are going after kids," said Blaise. "All we can do as police officers is ask the population to keep calling and we can try to put these people in jail."

Last week, Haitian police announced they had arrested a suspect in Natacha Dessources' kidnapping. But that brought little comfort to her mother, who is trying to leave Haiti with her son.

"I see visions of her on the ground ... I can't sleep at night," said Maggy Dessources, adding that she continued to get threatening phone calls from kidnappers even after Natacha's death. "Every time I hear about another child being kidnapped, I don't feel good. I can't live. I can't eat."

## **7. U.N. peacekeepers accused of raping girls In Haiti**

**By Reed Lindsay**

**Washington Times**

**December 18, 2006**

LEOGANE, Haiti -- Reports that peacekeepers raped teenage girls have surfaced in Haiti, where a United Nations mission so far had avoided the sexual abuse scandals that have sullied the international organization's reputation in other parts of the world.

Natasha, whose real name is being withheld to protect her, says she was raped by a Sri Lankan peacekeeper in this quiet city an hour west of Port-au-Prince when she was 15 years old. Her mother forbade her from making a complaint, until now, nearly two years later.

"I thought they came for peace, not war," said Natasha, now 17, who was the top student in her eighth grade class before she was forced to drop out after the purported rape. "I thought they came to protect us. I never thought they could abuse me in this way."

However, the U.N. peacekeeping mission in Haiti has investigated 34 other cases of reported sexual abuse and exploitation since it arrived in the country 27 years ago. Among them is the case of a 15-year-old girl who in September 2004 accused a Brazilian peacekeeper of raping her inside a U.N. naval base.

U.N. spokesman David Wimhurst said three investigations conducted found no evidence substantiating Natasha's charges. The girl's lawyer condemns the investigations as a whitewash, complaining that the U.N. never gave him or his client the final report.

No case of rape and only one case of sexual exploitation by U.N. personnel has been substantiated by the mission, which has more than 6,600 soldiers and 1,700 police officers. In March 2005, a U.N. investigation concluded that two Pakistani riot police officers had paid for sexual relations with a woman in the city of Gonaives. They were removed from Haiti, dismissed from the police force and sentenced to one year in prison by the Pakistani government, Mr. Wimhurst said.

"We take it very seriously," he said. "Clearly, the vast majority of our people are behaving themselves, and indeed, since some of these allegations don't pan out, I would say, it's not a huge problem."

Some victims afraid to come forward

Some rights activists say, however, that some victims are either too afraid or too intimidated by the U.N. bureaucracy to come forward.

"There are likely many more cases," said Polin Aleandre, a social worker who claims five street girls ages 9 to 13 received sexual advances from peacekeepers in front of the national palace. "Sex has a huge stigma in Haiti, and rape even more so. People don't talk about it at all."

The United Nations has been rocked by a series of sexual abuse scandals implicating peacekeepers in recent years, highlighted by the revelation of widespread cases of rape, pedophilia and prostitution in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2004. In response, departing U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan publicly admitted to the United Nations' failure to stop sexual misconduct and began an internal effort to fight the problem.

Since January 2004, the United Nations has investigated 319 peacekeepers for accusations of sexual abuse or exploitation, resulting in the repatriation of 144 military personnel, 17 police officers and 18 civilian officials. The world body has no authority to punish wrongdoers and only can ask that their home countries do so.

## **8. U.N. issues appeal for US\$98 million to help Haiti**

**AP and International Herald Tribune**

**December 18, 2006**

[http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2006/12/18/news/UN\\_GEN\\_UN\\_Haiti\\_Appeal.php](http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2006/12/18/news/UN_GEN_UN_Haiti_Appeal.php)

GENEVA: The United Nations appealed Monday for contributions of US\$98 million (€74.8 million) to help stabilize Haiti, where gang violence has forced hundreds to flee their homes in recent months.

The U.N. said it needs money for programs aimed at boosting Haiti's economic recovery and to help provide people with basic services.

Haiti is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere and most of its 8 million people live on less than US\$2 (€1.50) per day. More than 4 percent of Haitians are infected with HIV, and Haiti's maternal mortality rate is one of the world's highest.

The appeal also is aimed at "ensuring that authorities are better prepared in the event of natural disasters," said Joel Boutroue of the U.N. stabilization mission in Haiti.

The global body maintains an 8,800-strong peacekeeping force in the Caribbean country, sent to restore order after a bloody February 2004 revolt toppled former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

After a relative lull in violence, peacekeepers and Haitian police have been struggling to contain killings and kidnappings blamed on street gangs, some of which declare loyalty to Aristide.

Aristide lives in exile in South Africa.

## **9. In Haiti, AIDS is orphaning many**

**South Florida Sun-Sentinel**

**December 23, 2006**

Port-au-Prince

Charline might become a poet.

Maybe a teacher or a diplomat.

She might become a voice for all the children here who live alone or afraid in the city and in villages where people seem to die a lot.

But Charline is just 16.

She takes pride in her role as surrogate mother to the other children.

Her story begins with a song that she and the others sing:

"Let us, the children, live because we are the hope of the country.

We are like a spring that bubbles forth but never runs dry.

Children of Saline ...

of Haiti ...

of Miami ...

Let the children live in peace."

Here is the first thing to know about Haiti, the bare and brown western claw of the Caribbean island of Hispaniola: It is a nation of children.

Gray hair is getting harder and harder to find. Eight million people live here; four million are under age 14.

Too many of them are children without parents.

Today, a large slice of their generation — by some official accounts, 250,000 — has lost one parent or both to AIDS.

The global epidemic, now in its 25th year, has killed more than 400,000 people in Haiti. It has killed tens of thousands more throughout the Caribbean, steppingstone islands in Florida's backyard and one of the largest tourist playgrounds on Earth.

The number of children orphaned by AIDS will likely continue to grow. Experts see no end in sight. They voice concern: If things don't veer from their current path, Caribbean society, and the Caribbean economy that relies heavily on tourism, will suffer more.

Haiti, the poorest country in the hemisphere and sixth-poorest on Earth, has by far the region's highest rate of baby and child deaths, the highest rate of AIDS deaths, and the highest number of children orphaned by AIDS.

This year, for the first time, anyone living with HIV/AIDS in Haiti can get the new generation of drugs that turns a killer disease into a manageable condition.

But there are hurdles to getting the drugs: bad roads, distant villages, scant information, fear.

At the same time, of the thousands and thousands of young people left, a handful will be nurtured in places where they learn about the disease that killed their parents. Where they

will learn about acceptance over stigma, facts over fear. Where, in turn, they will learn to teach others who still fear and shun anyone connected to AIDS.

Charline is one whose life hangs in the balance. She was just 4 when her mother got sick with the wasting disease that the child knew only as tuberculosis. A father died before Charline knew him and an older brother left for the Dominican Republic, as thousands of Haitians do each year, looking for work.

Charline and another brother took care of their mother the only way they could.

They went into the streets to beg.

Charline:

"Every day, I put on my clothes and went to the street ...

Me and my brother, we each took a different route ...

In the middle of the day, I'd come home to my mother.

I'd cook for her. I'd braid her hair, and I'd make sure she drank her medicine ...

Sometimes when I didn't get any money to go home, I would send a message to my mother that I wasn't coming home that night."

Charline came to the street when the AIDS epidemic was in its 12th year. The disease had claimed thousands of lives. About that time, doctors, missionaries and others who worked with children saw something different: more kids in the street.

It soon became clear: Hundreds were orphans who had lost one parent or both to AIDS. The children often didn't know what killed their mothers or fathers. If others knew, those children were treated like walking dead. No orphanages would take them.

Something else they didn't know: They could well be carrying the virus, too, because roughly one-fourth of children born to HIV/AIDS-infected mothers are carriers themselves.

On the streets, children look for a new family, people who look out for one another, called a "cartel."

Charline found hers among the older kids who slept under the benches in front of Haiti's National Palace, in Champs de Mars park.

She stood out. For one thing, she was a girl.

Ten years ago, street kids were mostly boys. The girls came later, as the epidemic killed more mothers.

Charline showed up in clean clothes and then went home most nights to a mom. She was on the street, but not yet of the street, a big difference in Haiti. She was not a kokorat, the name for kids who live on the street full time.

Charline:

"A man came ... and asked what was happening to me.

I told him how the other kokorat attacked me ...

He told me I should go talk to this woman in the car.

I did not want to go ...

Very often people wanted to steal me because I was a nice girl.

People would always tell me that they wanted to take me to foreign lands ...

I was afraid that this woman was going to take me away, and I'd never see my mother again."

Charline at age 7 could have been a restavek, a child sold or sent off to relatives to work as a household slave.

She could have stayed on the street, become a prostitute, or maybe been sold and shipped over the border to the Dominican Republic.

Instead, she went to the woman in the car, a well-connected advocate for women and children, one of those unexplained angels sent to save lives.

Charline:

"I mustered my strength and walked over to the car and the woman ...

She picked me up and sat me on her lap.

She asked me why I was in the street, and I was telling her all about my mother ...

I told her that I hadn't brought my mother anything to eat for a while, that I had to go and see her.

And she bought clothes for me.

She bought me sandals."

Nearly a mile above the city is La Maison l'Arc en Ciel, Rainbow House, the first orphanage in the country, and still one of only a few, built for children of AIDS dead.

It is here that Charline arrived nine years ago.

The sanctuary was founded in 1996 by a French Canadian lawyer and her Haitian husband in response to a gaping national need. Haiti had orphanages, dozens in every major city, some run by churches, some by the government. But none, not one, would knowingly take a child orphaned by AIDS.

Danielle and Robert Penette hoped to change that. They found a home on a choice plot of mountain land — a mansion once owned by the family of the wife of Haiti's former dictator Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier.

Within the year, Rainbow House had 17 children, the youngest 14 months old.

The Penettes had one rule: No child older than 6, because after that, children are too tough to reach, too far gone.

But something about Charline touched them. They gave her a home.

Charline is luckier than most, living in the protective fold of Rainbow House. Twice she tried to escape over the compound walls, to go back to the city to beg, to bring help for her mother, maybe to keep her alive a bit longer.

Her mother died one month after Charline arrived.

Charline:

"When my mother died I wasn't sad at all because I saw that she was suffering so much ...

After her death, I became very mean ...

When I realized I didn't have a mother or a father anymore, I started crying.

I did not sleep. I could not eat.

But you know, it was Mrs. Penette who gave me strength.

She always told me that if I was here today in this orphanage it was because I had enough strength to take care of my mother."

As part of their social education, the children at Rainbow House who were old enough to understand heard the question: What would they do if they found out a friend, a teacher or a roommate had HIV, the virus that causes AIDS?

The questions are the underpinning of the Rainbow House philosophy: The only right way to live is to embrace anyone who is infected.

After the deaths of some of the younger children, Charline's emotions softened.

She opened her arms when the younger girls, some frail and sick, climbed into her lap wanting to play and be held, wanting her to love them back.

They were her new family, and they needed her, just as her mother had.

Charline is a young woman now. She attends eighth grade at a school near Rainbow House.

She will leave in a few years to start a new phase of her life.

Right now, she is a teenage girl much like teenage girls everywhere.

She thinks about her future, about where her path will lead outside the compound walls. She imagines becoming a poet, a teacher, a diplomat, a doctor. But wherever she goes, she says, her true mission will be this:

To speak for children who are affected by HIV/AIDS.

It is, she explains, her calling. Her mission from God.

Charline:

"If God did not see that I can stand up and fight against this disease, he'd never give it to me ... I praise God that he chose me to be sero-positive ...

It's because God sees me as a special person that he makes me sick."

In the Caribbean, as in the United States, being infected with HIV/AIDS no longer means certain death.

Powerful drugs that control symptoms and slow the path of the virus have poured into the Caribbean nations that need them most, including Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Jamaica and Guyana.

Medicine that prevents pregnant women from passing the virus on to their babies is there for the asking as well.

These medicines hold half the key to this generation's future.

The other half: bravery, as Charline and the children at Rainbow House so well know.

Because, to get to the medicine, you have to step forward. And that means telling someone — doctors, family, friends — that you, or maybe your loved one ones, are infected.

## **10. Hope after H.O.P.E. for Haiti?**

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In its final hours, the 109th Congress gave new life to Haiti's manufacturing sector, passing a trade bill that included the H.O.P.E legislation that would create up to 7,000 new jobs by allowing Haitian assembly plants to import, duty-free, textiles that would be made into clothing for the U.S. market. While not a long-term solution to Haiti's ills, the symbolism of this action went further to bolster the morale of the Haitian private sector than anything in recent years.

Haiti suffers from many problems, not the least of which is lack of jobs. Violence and kidnappings continue to undermine security in Port au Prince. Even with the presence of a robust U.N. Peace Mission, a country of 8 million people without jobs spells insecurity. The rigorous effort by the international community to reinvent the Haitian National Police is only part of the solution to a complex country where law enforcement is franchised to many different groups rather than controlled by the state. What vexes those who want Haiti to succeed is just how to create a viable and sustainable development program.

While H.O.P.E may represent a small victory, other positive signs may auger for a different approach. A donor's meeting at the end of November in Madrid yielded almost \$80 million to support good governance. And the World Bank decision to offer Haiti debt reduction also will help alleviate the drain on Haiti's limited revenue. Successful municipal elections held this month marked the first time since 1995 that Haitians democratically elected leaders of local government. And even a new effort to create a non-corrupt civil service is under way.

But the most promising signs that may make the difference in the coming years will be centered on a push to help Haiti become energy independent through the use of biomass energy.

Renewable energy could transform Haiti. A World Bank study reported that growing energy crops creates jobs in addition to fuel. In a country totally dependent on foreign oil for its energy needs, such independence could prove revolutionary.

This is not science fiction. Haiti is a perfect candidate for growing oil-seed crops. In rural areas, where 70 percent of the population remains engaged in subsistence agriculture, developing an indigenous biofuels market could transform the countryside and prevent the urban migration that continues to swell the slums of Port au Prince.

The environment could also be saved. And the proven anti-erosion qualities of seed crops like Jatropha and Castor bean could also revitalize the soil in a country that is 96 percent deforested and where every rainfall puts thousands of people at risk for natural disasters. And with crops such as Jatropha, the bush is a natural fence since its leaves are poisonous to animals.

Unfortunately, helping Haiti to become energy self-sufficient is not a priority for donors despite the potential it represents. It never came up at the Madrid meeting. And U.S. development assistance has yet to see this type of sustainable agriculture in Haiti as a means of long-term poverty alleviation.

If real hope is to be restored in Haiti, it must go beyond the trade incentives embodied in the H.O.P.E legislation. Urgent action is needed so that a U.S. biomass policy for the Caribbean addresses not only the regional dilemma of foreign oil dependency, but also moves Haiti away from the trajectory of state failure, a threat that U.S. policymakers consider a grave danger to U.S. interests.

With Brazil as the lead nation in the U.N. peace operation in Haiti, the technical means for bio-energy transformation could get underway within the next year. The combined power of U.S. economic support, coupled with Brazil's biomass expertise, could certainly be applied to a place such as Haiti. It could also demonstrate that ending addiction to fossil fuels, a goal President Bush endorses, can also be applied to one of the great development challenges in our hemisphere.

In a country just a two-hour flight from the U.S. mainland, the risk of state failure looms large. Support for bioenergy as part of the solution to Haiti's economic dilemma -- unemployment and lack of energy -- could advance the development of Haiti, and reinforce the governance and security reforms that Haitians so desperately deserve.

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