A Helping Hand for Haiti

By Hadley Dyer

Over the last few years, Haiti has seen several devastating natural disasters — from a string of hurricanes to the recent earthquake that put thousands of people in danger. Find out what Canadians are doing to help Haitians recover and prepare for the future.

Turbulent Timeline

Read on for the facts about Haiti’s harrowing recent history of natural disasters.

WHEN: 2008
WHAT: Hurricanes Fay, Gustav, Hanna, and Ike

Four storms pummeled Haiti in August and September 2008. Nearly 800 people died and more than 100,000 homes were damaged or destroyed. Electricity was knocked out, and belongings were swept away.

Most people in Haiti have to grow their own food, and many lost their crops when the storms triggered flooding and mudslides. Houses were submerged by dirty water. When the floodwaters receded, much of the healthy topsoil, which contains the nutrients needed for growing plants, had been washed away.

WHEN: 2010
WHAT: An earthquake that measured 7.3 on the Richter scale

On January 12 of this year, an earthquake shook Haiti to its core. Buildings crumbled, electricity was cut off, and hundreds of thousands of people were injured or killed. Many cities and towns were devastated, including the capital, Port-au-Prince, where two million people live.

More than 300,000 people were left homeless. Aid organizations rushed to help. Some rescued survivors from the rubble, while others treated injured people or handed out food, water, clothing, and other supplies.

Richter Scale

The Richter scale measures the strength of an earthquake on a scale from 1.0 to 9.0 — with 1.0 being the weakest. The scale grows by powers of 10. This means that an earthquake measuring 7.0 on the Richter scale is 10 times more powerful than one that measures 6.0.

Canada needs lots of help to recover from disasters. Flip the page to find out:

✓ how three Canadians help Haiti respond to disasters
✓ how YOU can get involved

Canadian aid worker Catherine Marquis (far right) stands with volunteers from the Haitian Red Cross.

HAITI FACT BOX

Country name: The Republic of Haiti
Capital: Port-au-Prince
Size: 28,000 sq. km (11,000 sq. mi.), about half the size of Nova Scotia
Population: 10 million
Location: The Caribbean island of Hispaniola, 77 km (48 mi.) southeast of Cuba

Major languages: French, Creole

Background: Haiti is one of the poorest countries on the planet. Jobs are scarce, and more than half the country lives on less than $1 per day. About 80 percent of Haitians live below the poverty line, which means they don’t earn enough money to pay for necessities like shelter and food.

Haiti is located in a part of the Atlantic Ocean known as the hurricane belt, which includes the Caribbean Sea and the Gulf of Mexico. The hurricane belt is close to the equator, where the air is very hot and humid. As a storm passes over the warm ocean water, it gathers energy and force. In a hurricane (also known as a cyclone), strong winds blow in a counterclockwise circle, reaching as much as 250 km/h (155 mph)! Heavy rain adds to the storm’s power.

When hurricanes hit, flooding isn’t far behind.

After the earthquake, many buildings collapsed.
Caring Canadians
People from all over the world are jumping into action to help Haiti. Meet three Canadians making a difference.

1. Rapid Responder
Canadian Red Cross worker Marilou Poirier is in charge of sending emergency supplies to countries struck by disaster. In 2008, she flew to Haiti to help coordinate the Rapid Response Project (RRP). She gave OWL a step-by-step guide to running an RRP.

2. Helpful Healer
Canadian Patsy Aidana is the president of the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY).

Patsy’s organization created the Children in Crisis fund, which supports programs that use books to help heal the wounds caused by conflicts and natural disasters. In the past, trained volunteers have gone into hard-hit areas in Haiti to share poems and stories. Selected schools also received 100 new books to create new libraries.

3. Fantastic Fundraiser
Thirteen-year-old Bilaal Rajan of Toronto — the youngest spokesperson for the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) — already has a long history of fundraising. Now he’s challenging kids across Canada to help Haiti by each donating $100.

Bilaal first got involved with UNICEF Canada in 2004, when he issued the same challenge across South Asia after an earthquake. “Some people were a little skeptical when I said my goal was for kids to raise $1 million,” he says. “But we raised millions of dollars. We’ve already proven that’s possible.”

Bilaal has promised to shave his head in honour of the school or student who raises the most money for Haiti. The principal at Bilaal’s school will also be sacrificing his hair to the cause.

YOU Can Make a Difference!
Follow these steps to raise funds and help the Haiti relief effort.

- Visit UNICEF Canada at unicef.ca
- Get inspiration from UNICEF’s cool fundraising ideas, like the “Dare to Wear Challenge”
- Set up your own fundraising page, where you can collect pledges, and post pictures and videos from your fundraising events

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