

## **More about Haiti**

### **History**

Haiti is located on the Caribbean island of Hispaniola, which it shares with the Dominican Republic. Only about a 90 minute plane ride from Miami, FL, this nation is one of our oldest and closest neighbors. Haiti became independent in 1804 after a revolt by African slaves against their French colonial masters, though the US refused to recognize Haiti as an independent country until after the Civil War. France and other foreign governments continued to interfere in Haiti's affairs, culminating in the 1914 occupation of the country by US troops. After the end of the occupation, Haiti was ruled by a succession of dictators, most notably the father and son duo of Francois and Jean-Claude Duvalier. In 1990, democracy was reestablished with the election of Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who was deposed by rebel groups in 2004. Haiti's current president is Rene Preval.

### **Poverty**

With a per capita income of approximately \$660 per year, Haiti has the weakest formal economy in the Western hemisphere, and is one of the 25 poorest countries in the world. Over 7% of children die at birth, and the number of Haitian mothers who die in childbirth is 30 times larger than the number of American mothers who die in childbirth. Half of children under 5 are malnourished.

### **Education**

Only 50% of school age children are enrolled in any school, and over a third of school age girls will never attend school. It costs an average of \$131 USD to send a child to school (including school supplies and transportation), which is too expensive for most families. Almost 75% of teachers lack adequate training, and less than 40% of schools have drinkable water. Nearly 40% of the population is completely illiterate.

### **2010 Earthquake**

On January 12, 2010, an earthquake with magnitude 7.0 on the Richter Scale struck Haiti. According to official estimates, 230,000 were killed, 300,000 injured, and 1,000,000 made homeless, who now live in temporary camps. As of October 2010, major rebuilding has yet to begin, and only 10% of international aid pledged towards the reconstruction has been delivered.

### **Restavec**

Restavec (also spelled restavek) denotes a child who has been sent away to work as a domestic servant because their family is too poor to care for them. Often, these children are sent to more urban areas, where the work in conditions akin to child slavery. Restavec children are typically promised a better life, but rarely receive an education, and are often subjected to mistreatment, abuse, and sexual harassment. Over 225,000 children are believed to be in restavec situations. According to a study by the Pan-American Development Foundation, unschooled children are at greatest risk for exploitation by the restavec system.