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Neither crocodile tears nor silence

Solidarity with the Haitian People

José Antonio Gutiérrez D.

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Tragedy strikes once again Haiti. This time, it was a fierce 7 degree earthquake which has devastated the country and turned it into rubble. We have yet to know the exact number of victims, but the Red Cross is talking about 3 million affected and the number of dead could well go up to 100,000 – a horrible count if we take into account that the country has a population of only 8 million. The images circulating of survivors crushed under the rubble begging for help, of wounded children, of people breaking down in tears for the death of their relatives, give a much more accurate sense of the horror of this tragedy – much better than anything we could say.

In this terrible moment, as usual, we stand with the Haitian people. We give them all of our solidarity, their pain being our pain, and from this forum we call our readership and anyone aware to help generously through the humanitarian organisations that have sent appeals in order to bring some relief in these dramatic conditions.

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Also, we cannot help feeling a just sense of disgust with the hypocrisy of an “international community” that once again is shedding crocodile tears in the face of this “incomprehensible tragedy” (to borrow Obama’s own words), without recognizing their own share of responsibility in it – the impact of the earthquake was so devastating because this is a people already devastated by a century of military intervention, shameless plunder, of US- and French-backed autocratic regimes and of international financial institutions’ policies aiming at ruining the Haitian people for the benefit of few. This country has been turned into an enormous sweatshop, where the majority of its people survive thanks to charity. We are not faced with a mere natural disaster, as the media would like us to believe: we are, in fairness, facing a man-made tragedy. This earthquake merely came to finish the job started by the US, France, Canada, the MINUSTAH (the occupation troops of the UN), the International Monetary Fund and fake development agencies such as USAID.

They didn’t care about the Haitian people when they drowned in a fraudulent external debt acquired by the dictatorship of the Duvalier, and they never felt any “anguish” whatsoever in looting even the last penny of this starved and impoverished country;

They didn’t care about the Haitian people when they “had to” impose structural adjustment programmes in the ‘90s, that had such calamitous results on the population, as for example with the case of the reduction in tariffs for imported staples such as rice. The result of this was the absolute destruction of the Haitian peasantry, which was driven to the slums of Port-au-Prince – leaving a country that up to then was perfectly able to feed itself, to starve to death, as shown by the hunger rebellion of April 2008.

They didn’t care about the Haitian people when the dictatorships of Duvalier, Namphy, Avril, Cedras and Latortue (all of which had the approval of Washington and Paris) raped,

maimed, “disappeared” and massacred thousands of Haitians. Some of them, such as Jean Claude Duvalier, live luxuriously in France. Others, such as Raoul Cedras, thanks to the pay received from the US as part of their agreement to step down from power, turned into respectable businessmen – in Panama, in the case of Cedras.

They didn’t care about the Haitian people when we heard of thousands of denunciations of sexual abuse by the troops of the “civilising” mission of MINUSTAH, who still occupy, rape and murder in absolute impunity. Proof of that was the repatriation to Sri Lanka of over a hundred Sri Lankan blue helmets in November 2007, after having been accused of rape; in their country, they did not face even a pantomime of a trial.

They didn’t care about the Haitian people when the sweatshops came to grossly distort the Haitian economy, paying starvation wages while abuses of all sorts were taking place in their compounds on a daily basis.

The list of reasons to be indignant with the hypocritical sorry statements of people like Sarkozy, Obama, Ban-Ki-Moon and Lula, is way too long to give it in full length. Let us just say that the more miserable a population is, the stronger it will be hit by the vicissitudes of nature. That misery has been caused by forces imposing the current social model through dictatorships and international pressures; if three out of four people living in Port-au-Prince dwell in shacks, in slums that sprung out of the Haitian economic ruin (mainly of the countryside), can we really wonder that the death toll has to be counted in the thousands?

We hope that the solidarity of the people all over the world with their Haitian brethren will be massive. As has been previously said, solidarity is the tenderness of the people. And we hope that this solidarity, on which thousands of lives currently depend on, arrives to its destination instead of being trapped in a cobweb of NGOs and Aid Agencies. Doubtlessly, there are a number of reputable organisations today such as the Red Cross

doing much necessary relief work; but alongside them, sharks will appear to profit out of this tragedy. We have to watch out for them and the popular movement of Haiti needs to be alert to make sure that the assistance does actually arrive and is distributed efficiently. We also hope that there is no invasion of “white men” brought by some NGOs to do work, such as building houses, that the locals – 80% of whom are unemployed – can perfectly well do and should do themselves.

Once again, we call for your solidarity. Not only in the face of this particular tragedy that shakes anyone who has a heart in their breast, but solidarity now and always; a type of solidarity that scratches underneath the surface of devastation to understand the deep roots of the Haitian tragedy. Roots which are, in any case, deeper than an earthquake of force 7 on the Richter scale; in other words, a solidarity that forces us to rethink the relations that the great world powers have with our region, of which Haiti is only the worst example. This solidarity should make us question the role served by the troops that the majority of Latin American countries have in the military occupation of Haiti – an occupation that has had as much of a devastating effect as this earthquake, something hard to deny notwithstanding the photo-ops of MINUSTAH soldiers giving packets of rice to the homeless.