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## FEATURED Q&A

# What Would Help Haiti Prepare for Future Disasters?



A 7.2-magnitude earthquake that struck Haiti this month killed thousands and caused widespread damage. A partially collapsed building in the city of Jérémie is pictured. // Photo: USAID.

**Q** A powerful earthquake on Aug. 14 left more than 2,000 people dead and more than 100,000 homeless in Haiti just days before a tropical storm pummeled the country with heavy winds and rain, complicating rescue efforts. The pair of natural disasters struck the country on the heels of a political crisis following the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse in July. To respond to the latest disasters, how should the international community modify its aid plans of action based on lessons learned after the catastrophic earthquake in 2010? Are the objectives of current efforts focused on short-term humanitarian aid, or are they long-term initiatives to prepare for future natural disasters? How feasible is it for Haiti to proceed with its presidential election in November, as planned?

**A** Bocchit Edmond, Haiti's ambassador to the United States: "I wish to express my deepest gratitude to the Haitian diaspora, nongovernmental organizations and our international partners such as the United States through USAID for their collaboration with the government of Haiti in assisting the people of Haiti during this difficult time. Equally as important, Haitians living across Haiti—some with very minimal means—have also aided those in need. In a video that has gone viral, I saw Haitian children, men and women using donkeys to transport food and other types of goods to the most affected areas of the country. Those images reaffirmed the humanity that I knew existed in my beloved country. Unfortunately, we have witnessed far too many natural disasters due to global warming. However, through these humanitarian crises, the government has learned that to respond

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## TODAY'S NEWS

### POLITICAL

## At Least Three Killed in Brazen Bank Robberies in Brazil

At least three people were killed on Monday when heavily armed assailants attacked banks in the Brazilian city of Araçatuba. The robbers took residents hostage and used them as human shields.

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### BUSINESS

## Mexico's CFE Seeking Companies to Build Pipeline

The state utility wants to build a natural gas pipeline and floating liquefied natural gas terminal.

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### POLITICAL

## Opposition Will Reportedly Participate in Venezuela Vote

Venezuela's opposition, including the party of Juan Guaidó, are reportedly expected to announce that they will participate in the country's November election.

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Guaidó // File Photo: @jguaido via Twitter.

## POLITICAL NEWS

## Opposition Expected to Participate in Venezuela Elections

Venezuela's main opposition parties are slated to announce this week that they will be participating in upcoming elections for governors and mayors in November, after three years of boycotting elections, Reuters reported Monday, citing three sources with knowledge of the matter. Opponents of President Nicolás Maduro refused to participate in the 2018 presidential election and the 2020 legislative election,



**The opposition needs to be in it to win it—even if it can't.**

— Vanessa Neumann

claiming the votes were rigged in favor of the ruling Socialist Party. Candidates for opposition parties—including Juan Guaidó's Popular Will as well as the First Justice, Democratic Action and A New Time parties—are expected to be announced as soon as today or Wednesday, the sources said. The last time opposition parties participated in elections was in a 2017 vote for governors. "The opposition is in a difficult Catch-22 position. By running, it helps to legitimize the elections that will not meet 'free and fair' standards of any real democracy," Vanessa Neumann, the Venezuelan opposition's former ambassador to the United Kingdom, told the Advisor in a [Q&A](#) published Aug. 20. "However, if it doesn't run, the opposition can never build its own electoral system or following," she added. "The opposition needs to be in it to win it—even if it can't." Venezuelans are to elect leaders of 23 states and 335 municipalities in the vote, which is scheduled for Nov. 21, Reuters reported. Meanwhile, representatives of Maduro's government and the opposition are expected to resume Norway-mediated talks this Friday in Mexico City.

## At Least Three Killed in Brazen Bank Robberies in Brazil

At least three people were killed early Monday when armed assailants robbed several banks in the Brazilian city of Araçatuba, in São Paulo state, Reuters reported. The robbers took local residents hostage, using them as human shields and forcing them to cling to the roofs and hoods of their getaway vehicles in order to prevent police from shooting at them. Two residents and one bank robber were killed, Agence France-Presse reported. At least six people were injured. The assailants wore "bulletproof vests, rifles and helmets" and looked like soldiers, a witness who asked not to be identified told Globo TV. "The scenes of terror experienced by the population of Araçatuba will not go unpunished," said São Paulo Gov. João Doria, AFP reported. "Two criminals were captured and a third died when confronting the police." Doria said he assembled a task force made up of 380 police officers to hunt down the robbers. In the attacks, which happened around midnight, the robbers left a trail of explosive devices in their wake. More than 20 assailants were involved in the attack, using 10 vehicles, Reuters reported. The attackers also used drones to monitor the streets. The incidents were the latest in a series of violent bank heists in Brazil. A government Covid-19 relief program for poorer Brazilians has led banks in small cities to store more cash, leading them to be attractive targets for criminals, experts say, Reuters reported. Alvaro Camilo, the executive secretary of São Paulo's military police, urged residents not to leave their homes until authorities found and deactivated explosives that the robbers left behind. He said 350 police officers were in the city, tracking down the robbers. Camilo added that a Banco do Brasil branch in Araçatuba was being used as a repository for cash, a fact that state officials had not previously known. Robbers also targeted Banco do Brasil branches last December in the cities of Cametá and Criciúma. Camilo said it was unclear whether those heists were related to the ones in Araçatuba.

## NEWS BRIEFS

## Suriname Court Upholds 20-Year Sentence for Ex-President Bouterse

A court in Suriname on Monday upheld a 20-year jail sentence for former President Déni Bouterse for his involvement in the assassination of 15 opposition figures during his military rule in 1982, Caribbean Media Corporation reported. Bouterse, who led the country from 2010 until he lost last year's presidential election to current President Chan Santokhi, is planning to appeal the ruling, according to his attorney.

## Guatemalan Judge Orders Former Generals Tried on Genocide Charges

A judge in Guatemala on Monday ordered two high-ranking former generals to be tried on genocide charges stemming from the country's civil war, Reuters reported. Judge Miguel Ángel Gálvez ordered Manuel Benedicto Lucas and Manuel Antonio Callejas to stand trial in connection with the massacres of more than 1,700 people between 1978 and 1982 in the Quiché region, which is home to many Indigenous Maya. Callejas was in charge of national security, and Lucas, the brother of then-President Romeo Lucas, was an army officer.

## Panamanian Lawmakers Unanimously Approve Medical Cannabis Bill

Panama's national assembly on Monday unanimously passed legislation that would regulate the use of medical cannabis, the first Central American nation to do so, Reuters reported. The proposal, which the assembly's president, Crispiano Adames, hailed as "innovative," would establish a registry of authorized cannabis patients and allow for further research on the use of medical marijuana. The bill now goes to President Laurentino Cortizo for his signature.

## BUSINESS NEWS

## Mexico's CFE Seeking Private Companies to Build Gas Pipeline

Mexican state utility CFE is seeking formal expressions of interest from private companies to construct and operate a natural gas pipeline and floating liquefied natural gas, or FLNG, terminal, Natural Gas Intel reported Monday. The pipeline, which would be able to carry 500 million cubic feet per day (cf/d) of gas, would connect the city of Chinameca in Veracruz state to the Salina Cruz seaport in Oaxaca, where the 430 million cf/d FLNG terminal would be located. CFE would sell gas procured through its extensive pipeline network

**The pipeline would be able to carry 500 million cubic feet of gas per day.**

to the FLNG operator under a 25-year take-or-pay contract, and the operator would have exclusive rights to market liquefaction capacity and liquefied natural gas produced at the plant, NGI reported, citing auction documents. The operator would also have full ownership of the projects and would be liable for all associated risk, in exchange for "security and certainty" in the supply of gas, the company said, NGI reported. Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador has made strengthening state companies including CFE a cornerstone of his presidency. In February, the utility published its 2021-2025 business plan, with estimated investments of about \$3.12 billion this year in a bid to overhaul its generation capacity. "Perhaps the most important aspect of CFE's 2021-2025 business plan is that it makes clear what was already widely assumed: the state-owned utility seeks to enhance its dominant market position by avoiding competition from private players," Pedro Niembro, senior director at Monarch Global Strategies, told the Energy Advisor in a [Q&A](#) published Feb. 19.

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expediently and efficiently, there must be: 1.) proper coordination between multilateral partners and relevant ministries such as the Directorate for Civil Protection, which is equivalent to FEMA in the United States; 2.) integration of the Haitian diaspora in the official planning of disaster relief; and 3.) transparency and accountability for both domestic and foreign assistance. The country's immediate needs are medical assistance, water, food and shelter. The Haitian government is working on the enforcement of building codes across the country and on strengthening Haiti's armed forces as part of its long-term strategy. Natural disasters are inevitable, and part of the military's mission is to respond to external threats such as earthquakes. Considering the impact of the earthquake, proceeding with elections this year would severely undermine a free, fair and inclusive democratic process."

**A** **Francois Pierre-Louis, professor of political science at Queens College, City University of New York:** "More than 10 years ago when Haiti was hit by a catastrophic earthquake that killed more than 250,000 people and destroyed the country's main infrastructures in Port-au-Prince, the world poured its heart out for the Haitian people. Billions of dollars were pledged through international organizations to help it rebuild. Former U.S. President Bill Clinton led the recovery effort with the mantra 'Build it back better.' In 2010, Haiti had a functioning parliament, a legitimate president and was beginning to recover from years of economic decline, but it was not successful in rebuilding itself. The Haitian people never benefited from the aid that was given as most of it went back into the pockets of the very institutions that had pledged to rebuild the country. Haiti is in even worse shape today. However, it is a welcoming sign that the interim government has decided to coordinate all the aid that has been promised in this disaster. However, it has no capacity to enforce that decision.

This time, the international community should coordinate with the government to assure that the aid goes directly to those affected instead of relying on intermediaries to dispense it. It is impossible to plan for long-term initiatives without a legitimate government because long-term planning

**“The earthquake has made it impossible for elections to be held in November.”**

— Francois Pierre-Louis

requires major institutional reforms. Unfortunately, Haiti finds itself in a situation in which historical bad governance, corruption and impunity have prevented it from creating conditions for long-term planning. This forces it to focus primarily on short-term humanitarian aid that can never solve the country's chronic problems. Holding a presidential election in November was already a long-shot effort given the many crises that the country is facing. The earthquake has made it impossible for elections to be held in November. However, the interim government should not use it as an excuse to postpone the elections longer than needed because, without a legitimate government, the country will never recover from this disaster and other foreseeable catastrophes."

**A** **Roger Bilham, senior research scientist at the Cooperative Institute for Research in Environmental Sciences at the University of Colorado Boulder:** "With the memory of the 2010 Haiti earthquake still fresh in people's memories, it would appear that there are no excuses for additional loss of life in the Aug. 14 earthquake. The explanation for this second disaster, and others that will certainly follow, is that reconstruction and earthquake-resistant retrofits are almost entirely focused on the epicentral

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region where maximum damage occurred. Ruins are replaced by structures designed to resist future shaking, building codes are implemented for new construction, and inspections are mandated to assure adherence to sound construction practices. But this is equivalent to locking the barn door after the horse has bolted. The recently ruined epicenter is the least likely target for the next earthquake. Following the 2010 earthquake, a dozen locations, including Haiti's western peninsula, were earmarked as probable epicenters for future damaging shocks. Although earthquake construction codes were mandated (and largely adhered to) for all new construction after the 2010 earthquake, the buildings that collapsed in the 2021 earthquake were structures constructed prior to 2010. At a rough estimate, 90 percent of all of Haiti's buildings are pre-2010 and vulnerable to earthquake damage. Retrofits, the engineering alternative to wholesale reconstruction, are expensive and prohibitive for homeowners even in wealthy nations. In their absence in Haiti's northern and southern seismic belts, future earthquake disasters are unavoidable."

**A** **Bianca Shinn Desras, social justice advocate and policy advisor:** "History can be replicated in a cycle of repetitiveness when the facts and lessons are intentionally ignored. The international community must modify its approach by being inclusive and transparent. To best support the Haitian people, the international community will need to recognize the expertise of Haitians and allow them to use their skills appropriately as relevant partners. Furthermore, very little is being said about the impact climate change has on Haiti and its future. Long-term aid by the international community must include funding and support toward climate change. Haiti's extreme vulnerability to climate change and political instability will lead to an

adverse trajectory. Haiti's government and its international partners can no longer act in shock about the effects and devastation of extreme natural disasters. We can't prevent natural disasters, but we can plan for the aftershocks of these disasters through

“Often, planning for Haiti is done on a short-term and interim basis, while long-term planning exists in well-written documents that are never executed.”

— Bianca Shinn Desras

short-term and long-term planning. Often, planning for Haiti is done on a short-term and interim basis, while long-term planning exists in well-written documents that are never executed. It is time to sound the alarm and use the recent natural disasters as the cue to immediately begin building against more frequent and severe hurricanes and storms. Rural and isolated communities are at extreme risk of being wiped out at the hands of the next natural disaster due to the lack of infrastructure. The time is now to implement strategies to improve the dangers related to the effect of climate change and its enormous impact on infrastructures and institutions. It is perplexing to see the obliviousness to environmental injustice played out at all levels. Mother Nature has shifted the rules of the game, and it's time we adjust accordingly. Haitians do not want to see numbers or charts related to the cost of recovery efforts; they want to visibly benefit from the changes."

*The Advisor welcomes comments on its Q&A section. Readers can write editor Gene Kuleta at [gkuleta@thedialogue.org](mailto:gkuleta@thedialogue.org).*

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