Natural Disaster, Unnatural Destruction

January 14, 2010 By Paul Dalton

The earthquake in Haiti is one of those events so vast in scope as to be impossible to really comprehend from afar. While no place deserves this kind of devastation, Haiti is perhaps the worst place for such a disaster. If, as it has been said, Afghanistan is where empires go to die, Haiti might be where misery goes to live.

Haiti and AIDS are indelibly linked. Haitians were perhaps the most feared and reviled of the original 'Four H Club' of Haitians, Homosexuals, Heroin users and Hemophiliacs. Extreme poverty, language and cultural barriers served to isolate and demonize people from Haiti- especially those seeking refuge from the western hemisphere's poorest country.

If any place on earth deserves a break it is Haiti. Haiti was the first independent nation built by freed slaves. While Pat Robertson might like to entertain the racist fantasy that Haiti's long suffering is due to a 'deal with the devil' they supposedly struck to win independence, the truth is they shrugged off the all to human evil of slavery and have been suffering its lingering effects along with those colonialism, ineffective governance, a lack of natural resources, an inadequate infrastructure and international neglect ever since.

'Mother Nature,' can be exceptionally cruel, as can be seen by the bodies currently rotting in the streets of Port au Prince. The pictures of collapsed buildings, roads and hillsides tell of both the power of nature and the consequence of a country that just doesn't have what it needs. The lack of building codes has led to untold death and misery- and a bit of condescending recrimination all too reminiscent of the immediate aftermath of Katrina.

It doesn't have to be this way. Yesterday I read somewhere that every day cruise ships throw away more food than the average family in Haiti uses in a year. I don't know if that is accurate, but it at least serves as a good metaphor for the very real consequences of massive economic inequality. There is much that is out of our control in this world, and certainly earthquakes are one of those things. How we allocate and use the world's resources however is very much in our control.

While the 'Teabag Movement' gets its collective panties in a wad over entirely imagined 'creeping socialism'- the greatest threat to the world is on display today in Haiti, just as it was in New Orleans, as it was in Biafra, as it was with the Tsunami of 2004. While we have some influence on what we call 'natural disasters', they will always be a part of life on earth. As long as we tolerate a world where bankers get multi-million dollar bonuses for running their businesses in to the ground, while just a few hundred miles south of the richest country on Earth most people live on less than

a dollar a day- those natural disasters will have very unnatural consequences.

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