

# All Eyes on Haiti

By **Ariel Lebowitz** and **Laura Banfield**

**O**n January 25, 2010, the headline of *The Onion*, an American satirical weekly, read "Massive Earthquake Reveals Entire Island Civilization Called 'Haiti.'"

Unfortunately, this is funny because it is almost true. Many people in North America had never given any consideration to the poorest nation in the western hemisphere until a 7.0 earthquake on January 12, 2010, made it impossible to ignore it any longer. Haiti's government has reported more than 200,000 people were killed, a greater number injured, and around 1.5 million were left homeless. Homes, schools, and hospitals collapsed. Even the presidential palace and parliament were destroyed.

Before the earthquake, the 2009 Human Development Report ranked Haiti, a small island nation with a population of approximately 10 million, 149th out of 182. Half a million children aged six to 12 were not in school, and 38% of the adult population was illiterate. Less than half the population had access to drinking water. Haiti's recent history has been one of conflict and disaster necessitating an armed United Nations presence since 1993. However, unless there was a tropical storm or a particularly deadly clash with UN forces, news of the plight of Haiti's population was largely unreported in Canada.

Since the earthquake, world leaders have come together to discuss Haiti's future; international institutions and foreign governments have pledged hundreds of millions of dollars in aid; musicians and celebrities have held massive benefit concerts; Canadians have donated more than \$154 million, to be matched by the Canadian government; ALA midwinter participants collected \$27,084.50 USD just days afterwards; and there

are new stories of generosity and hope everyday. World leaders convened a major conference in New York to pledge assistance to Haiti and figure out how to shift their focus from humanitarian aid to rebuilding a country.

Though the basics of food, water, shelter, and medical aid remain critical, education, schools, and libraries are going to help the Haiti of tomorrow fulfill its potential as it rebuilds. If you are interested in helping, there are a number of organizations and programs that you might consider. Here are just a few to get you started:

### **The Blue Shield**

The Blue Shield, along with an affiliated network of member organizations, has been actively engaged in relief and recovery efforts targeting heritage and cultural properties in Haiti. To assist in the coordination of such activities and promote the sharing of information, the Blue Shield is maintaining an online directory of damaged cultural properties, which includes libraries, archives, and museums. For each cultural property, the directory provides photos, a description of the known extent of the damage, details of the efforts thus far, and information about which organization is leading the recovery and rehabilitation. In addition, the Blue Shield and its member organizations have also put out a call for volunteers to register online. This registry is being used to link potential volunteers with the organizations overseeing and supporting the various efforts. To date, more than 700 people from around the world have registered.

For more information and a link to their online volunteer form, visit [haiti2010.blueshield-international.org](http://haiti2010.blueshield-international.org).

## **IFLA - International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions**

IFLA is working collaboratively alongside various other organizations affiliated with the Blue Shield to provide both people and funds. People wishing to donate their time and expertise are encouraged to register with the Blue Shield. Donations to Haiti libraries are being received through the Stichting IFLA Fund. From the beginning IFLA has been engaged in efforts to determine the extent of the damage to both the collections and the people and to assist in sharing such information across sectors.

To learn more about IFLA and stay up to date on libraries in Haiti, visit [ifla.org/en/haiti-earthquake-2010](http://ifla.org/en/haiti-earthquake-2010).

## **dLOC - Digital Library of the Caribbean**

The Digital Library of the Caribbean, dLOC, has devised a Protecting Haitian Patrimony initiative in consultation and collaboration with local, governmental, and non-governmental partners. A report outlining the initial assessment and recommendations is available through the website. Like the Blue Shield, dLOC has created an online registry for volunteers, specifically archivists and librarians. They are also looking for people to assist with packaging and sending materials, organizing fundraisers, and travelling to Haiti if needed. dLOC is accepting financial donations. Visit dLOC at [web1.dloc.com](http://web1.dloc.com).

Other organizations such as the American Library Association and Libraries without Borders (Bibliothèques sans frontières) are accepting donations towards the recovery of libraries and archives in Haiti. Visit [ala.org/ala/aboutala/offices/iro/iroactivities/haitirelieffund.cfm](http://ala.org/ala/aboutala/offices/iro/iroactivities/haitirelieffund.cfm) and [www.librarieswithoutborders.org/haiti.php](http://www.librarieswithoutborders.org/haiti.php).

**A**nd as a final note, you may remember hearing something at Super Conference this year regarding fundraising for Haiti by OLA through UNICEF. Online donations are still welcome; the pledge page is available at [my.e2rm.com/personalPage.aspx?registrationID=818583](http://my.e2rm.com/personalPage.aspx?registrationID=818583).

Libraries should no longer be a luxury in Haiti. Let's help them become an important part of the rebuilding process.

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