



“We are people not animals!” Women living in IDP camps protest outside the Ministry of Social Affairs, on World Habitat Day, October 3. “We call on the NGOs to stop building transitional shelters and invest that money in a government-run social housing programme,” says Reyneld Sanon, co-ordinator of FRAKKA, the leading Haitian housing rights coalition. Photo Credit: Alexis Ekert, Otherworlds, [www.otherworldsarepossible.org](http://www.otherworldsarepossible.org)

“We’re fed up of living in tents!”

## Nou Bouke Viv Anba Tant

The sit-in that blocked the road in front of the Ministry of Social Affairs on World Habitat Day was peaceful but noisy. “We are people not animals!” “Get us out of these pigeon cages!” “Public housing authority now!” chanted the mostly female crowd. All members of the Housing Rights Coalition, drawn from more than 30 IDP camps that are still home for the estimated 595,000 people still living in the mud of another Haitian rainy season, they insisted on being heard. “We’re fed up of living in tents!” proclaimed their banner.

Complaining that the continued construction of temporary housing was a waste of time, that a national plan for permanent housing should be developed by government not

NGOs or donors, the crowd blocked entry through the Ministry’s metal gate until a letter outlining their demands had been delivered. “What’s happening now is totally unacceptable,” said economist Camille Chalmers. “We need a national social housing plan under the Ministry of Social Affairs,” insisted another leader, Antonal Mortimé.

The demands in the letter reiterated those raised in a meeting with the Haitian Senate’s Sub-Committee for Social Affairs on September 6. They include:

**A Senate Housing Committee:** The creation of a Senate committee on housing with camp residents providing regular evidence and expertise

**Committed Funding:** That parliament pass legislation assigning dedicated funds on an annual basis for a substantive social housing programme

**Housing Office:** The revitalization of the public housing authority, (the *Entreprise Publique de Promotion des Logements Sociaux* or EPPLS), the agency charged with planning, building and administering social housing

**Parliamentary Investigation:** A detailed accounting of how the huge reconstruction sums already assigned to housing are being spent

**National Housing Plan:** That the Haitian State take effective control of reconstruction and housing by consulting on and agreeing a National Housing Plan to which all pri-

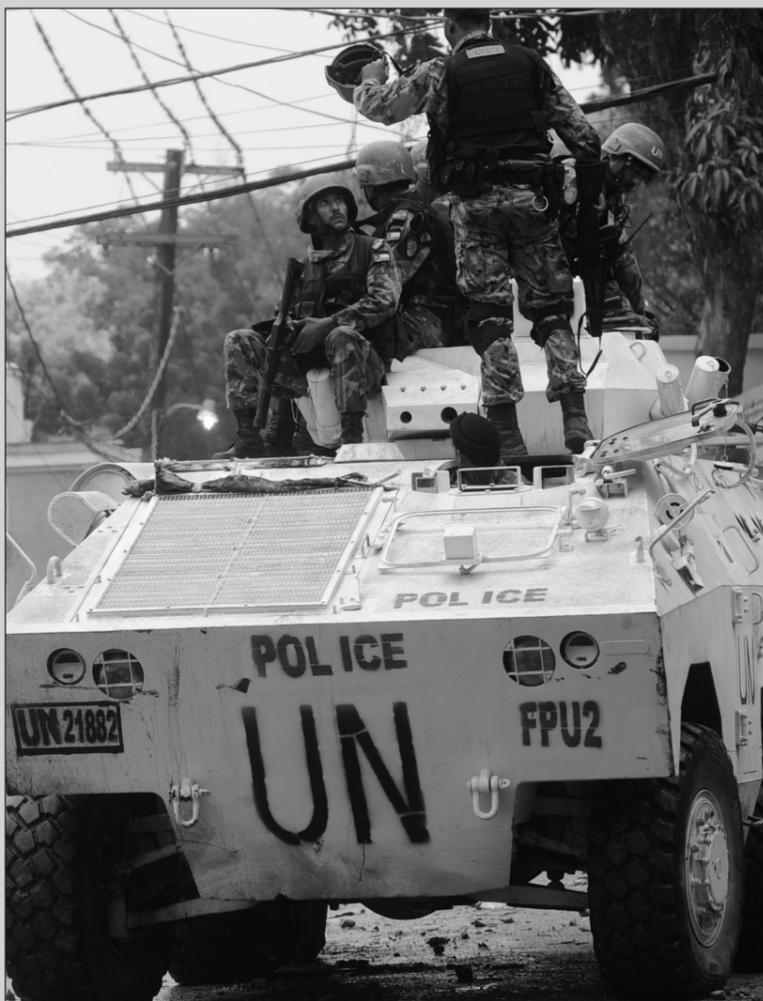
vate donors and NGOs must conform.

These key demands strike at the core of what has gone wrong to date. One, a lack of prioritization of popular, social housing post-earthquake; two, a lack of consultation and inclusion of the homeless themselves in any planning; three, lack of government control of housing funds and plans; four, the absence of a national housing plan as the basis for reconstruction; five, the effective privatization of what house building there is by foreign NGOs. All that has added up to one thing: a lack of results.

The facts are stark. To date the only real housing program has

# Crimes, conflict, and cholera

## MINUSTAH – stabilising the status quo



**Lame Okipasyon, Occupying Army. If it looks like one, acts like one, claims immunity like one, then it is one. MINUSTAH troops, using armoured personnel carriers and helicopter gunships against civilians in flimsy shacks.** Photo credit: Bill Boyce

On July 28, 2011, an eighteen year-old Haitian youth was gang-raped in the small southern town of Port-Salut by Uruguayan soldiers belonging to the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH). The assault was filmed on a cell phone. The president of Uruguay, José Mujica apologized, calling it an “isolated incident.” Not quite. On August 18, 2010, a sixteen-year old boy was found hanged in a MINUSTAH compound in the northern city of Cap-Haïtien. Despite eye-witness accounts and medical evidence suggesting he was murdered, MINUSTAH officials insisted he had committed suicide.

Far from being aberrations, the suborning, sexual exploitation and rape of Haitians by MINUSTAH forces have actually become the norm. In one instance, in November 2007, 11 Sri Lankan soldiers were sent home for involvement in the systematic sexual abuse of young women and minors. To many Haitians, increasing numbers of whom have taken to the streets to protest, a UN force deployed in one of the world’s poorest states at an annual cost of more than \$850m, is increasingly behaving like a victorious army in conquered territory, viewing the Haitians they are mandated to protect as spoils of war.

All allegations against UN troops are, effectively, “case closed.” Not that there was ever, in any such “incident,” an actual case to answer. Under the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) governing their deployment, MINUSTAH personnel are totally immune to prosecution in Haiti, even for crimes committed outside their official capacity. The seven-year presence of MINUSTAH is in fact punctuated with such egregious human rights abuses, making it clear that, far from keeping the peace in Haiti, MINUSTAH is simply one of its principal violators.

MINUSTAH was first deployed on June 1, 2004, three months after the ouster of the democratically-elected President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. From the outset, the status of the UN force has been of very dubious constitutionality: its presence was “consented to” by a US-imposed *de facto* regime. But if its legitimacy is, at the very least, shaky, its purpose could not be clearer. The ostensible justification for MINUSTAH is to protect Haitians from themselves – the line being

that, were heavily-armed troops in full battle-gear and armoured personnel carriers not patrolling the streets, Haiti would degenerate into a bloodbath – that criminal gangs would rule the streets.

Yet it soon became clear that MINUSTAH’s overriding mission was not peace but politics, that it’s broad brush definition of “bandits” and armed groups known as “chimères,” included anyone suspected of being sympathetic to Aristide’s *Fanmi Lavalas* party. That meant predominantly the poor, and, in particular, the poorest of the poor living in neighbourhoods like Bel Air, Martissant and Cité Soleil. In essence, MINUSTAH was not in Haiti to protect Haitians but to protect the socio-economic status quo, a status quo already reinforced by the ouster of the elected government.

In a cable dated October 1, 2008 published by *Wikileaks*, then US Ambassador, Janet Sanderson, made all this very clear. MINUSTAH’s prime function was to suppress “populist and anti-market economy political forces” she asserted. Some international human rights organizations have estimated that three to four thousand “bandits” – including hundreds of women and children – were “neutralised” by the *de facto* regime that succeeded President Aristide in partnership with MINUSTAH.

On more than one occasion, but most notoriously in the July 2005 assault on Cité Soleil, MINUSTAH deployed armour and helicopter gunships in punitive raids against the occupants of flimsy shacks – the ultimate, quite literally, in overkill. Such operations are not cheap, but Ambassador Sanderson regarded it as a snip: “a financial and regional security bargain for the USG [United States Government]”

### Lame Okipasyon. Opposition Grows

Little wonder, then, that popular opposition to what Haitians term *lame okipasyon* (the occupying army) is becoming increasingly vocal. In October 2010, the outbreak of cholera provided massive impetus to that opposition. Local people immediately suspected that the source of the outbreak was a Nepalese MINUSTAH compound on the banks of the Artibonite river.

As the disease spread, reaching the capital and crossing the border into the Dominican Republic, so did the anger at the UN’s refusal to mount a serious investigation into the source of the outbreak. At one protest in Cap-Haïtien in November 2010, MINUSTAH troops fired on protestors, killing three and wounding scores. A year on, two scientific studies have provided incontrovertible evidence that the Nepalese soldiers were the source of the outbreak. The UN, however, still refuses to accept responsibility, let alone liability.

Be that as it may, the renewal of the MINUSTAH mandate was a foregone conclusion. With all those “reconstruction” contracts to protect, and new assembly plants in the Free Trade Zones to police, Washington and its allies will need MINUSTAH for a good while yet. ■



**Civil society organizations protesting the presence of the United Nations troops on the 96th anniversary of the 1915 US occupation of Haiti. Protestors demand their withdrawal and compensation for the victims of the cholera epidemic.** Photo credit: brikourinouvelgaye.com

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been the construction of T-shelters, of which 94,879 had been built to end-August, with another 113,399 planned. The ‘T’ stands for transitional, begging the obvious question: transitional to what?

Not permanent housing for sure. A mere 4,596 permanent homes have been built to date with just 12,281 more planned. “It’s almost two years now. We call on the NGOs to stop building transitional shelters and invest that money in a government-run social housing programme,” says Reynold Sanon, of FRAKKA, the housing rights co-ordination group. “What’s going on now is a total waste of time and money.”

It’s also a metaphor for so much of what counts for development in Haiti. If transitional, it is by definition unsustainable: If NGO-led, it is by definition unaccountable to Haitians: If private, it will not address the necessities of those most in need. If it by-passes the Haitian state and its agencies, it inevitably cultivates dependency. As such, all told, the present and future are

looking depressingly like the past in Haiti.

### T-Shelter; No Shelter

There is no agreed specification for a T-shelter – one reason it took so long to start building them. At the top-end are those that have concrete bases, wood frames and galvanized zinc roofs, with walls of varying materials usually, 9/16th plywood. At the other extreme are wood-frame structures with crushed rubble floors and tightly-stretched tarpaulins for walls, providing little more security than the tents.

Although some of these T-shelters can and will be improved and reinforced by their occupants, and will, as such, become permanent housing stock, many T-shelters already look like what they are – the slums of tomorrow. “Four rainy seasons at best, and as for standing up to earthquakes or hurricanes, well just forget it,” says one shelter expert.

Then there is the issue of who is getting the T-shelters. Everyone now accepts that those remaining in the fetid, often unserved camps

(see Haiti Briefing No. 67) are the most vulnerable: the poorest, the sickest, the most un- or underemployed. There’s a reason for that. The vast majority of those getting T-shelters own cleared land on which a T-shelter can be built. By definition, those that do not own land, who were renters or squatters before the earthquake, will remain homeless indefinitely if current policy continues.

A ground breaking investigation by *Ayiti Kale Je*, a grassroots media outlet, bears this out.<sup>1</sup> They conclude that nearly two-thirds of those remaining in official camps are landless – and demonstrate why. Resident after resident says that surveys and censuses by NGOs and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) have facilitated the extraction of residents with land, leaving those without stranded. “We don’t exist for them,” says Margareth Paul in the camp in Gerard Christophe Park in Léogane.

1. *Abandonné comme un chien errant – Abandoned like a Stray Dog* at <http://www.ayitikaleje.org>

This, in turn, is a result of the failure of the government to expropriate land for housing – declaring eminent domain for national need, paying, if necessary, fair market value – as it is entitled to do under the constitution. Many experts don’t even think it needs to do that. By some estimates, the state owns as much as 10% of the surface area of Haiti – a legacy of endless acquisition by dictators and autocrats. Some of this has been leased out but could be reclaimed, some is simply vacant. Much of this land is in the Port-au-Prince area, some of it even downtown.

The problem has been a lack of political will – the political will to make even token moves, not just for the sake of justice or equity, but for political stability and even economic growth. “Even when the Haitian rich don’t have to pay for it, even when international donors offer, the state, so long an adjunct and agency of the elite, can’t bring itself to move in a direction that is manifestly in its own interest,” complains one Shelter expert after 15 months in Haiti.

Unlike so many aid experts, he’s obviously been talking to Haitians. “They say we have leaders? We don’t...they’ve abandoned us like stray dogs,” Louise Delva of the Regal camp in Petit Goave told *Ayiti Kale Je*. “Martelly stood right there and said: ‘I have 30,000 houses but your President won’t give me the land to build them.’ Well now he is President. So where are the houses? We’re still waiting.” Guerda Anier told the *Miami Herald* from her IDP camp on the Champ de Mars, opposite the National Palace.

### A Man with a Plan But...

Well Martelly does now have a plan. Indeed, since he took office on May 14, he has demonstrated some real leadership on the housing issue. It is all relative of course, firstly to the almost complete paralysis of the previous administration of René Préval and secondly to Martelly’s own ambitious campaign pledge to close six key IDP camps in his first 100 days in office, and all remaining camps in a further 83 days (mid-November).

It was, and is, pie in the sky.

What has now emerged – hardly a National Housing Plan or something that might become one – is what is known colloquially as 6/16. The idea is to focus on clearing the six named camps while repairing and restoring the 16 neighborhoods from which the vast majority of the IDPs in them are drawn. The emphasis is on cash payment incentives, \$150 each plus \$500 for renters and up to \$3,500 to property owners who agree to repair their homes and offer free rent to IDP families for two to five years. New houses will only be offered to those families whose homes cannot be rebuilt *in situ*.

The plan is three-phased, with four camps first, two camps to follow and the “complete reconstruction” of the 16 *quartiers* to follow in phase three. The plan makes all the right noises about consultation, with committees from each *quartier* designed to foster dialogue and discuss options, and repeated references to “sustainable solutions,” “sustainable livelihoods”

and “community participation.” The IHRC liked it so much – or was so relieved to see any housing plan, having failed to produce one themselves for over a year – that in late July they backed it with \$78 million, even though they do not, as yet, have the money designated for this. Key donors and the Haiti Reconstruction Fund (HRF) do, and are backing this “neighborhood returns approach.”

The problem now is the usual implementation. The plan depends on co-ordinated, synchronized and integrated action to include censuses, surveys, consultations, land dispute resolution, rebuilding, infrastructure restoration, disbursements by everyone ranging from the UN, IOM, assorted NGOs, various Haitian ministries, HRF, to local mayors and most crucially, Haitian tenants and home-owners themselves. But on paper, at least, this is progress.

The practice is proving a little more problematic. In August, with the 100-day mark of Martelly’s presidency approaching, a survey of the six named camps found

that two had been completely or partially closed.<sup>2</sup> The residents of one, Stade Silvio Cator, closed by the mayor of Port-au-Prince on July 18, had been relocated to another camp where, by every measure conditions were worse. Some 64% of those evicted asked said they were given \$250; less than 40% of the minimum under the plan. The remaining 36% got nothing.

In the second camp, Place St. Pierre in Petionville, cash pay-offs had also gone ahead. About 600 families have received \$500 each, again well below the minimum with no offer of a T-shelter, repaired house or the rental optional envisaged in 6/16. In short, local mayors were short-circuiting Martelly’s plans and getting rid of IDPs on their own terms, even though most of the cash for the pay-offs seems to have come from national funds.

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2. *Haiti’s Housing Crisis: Results of a Household Survey on the Progress of President Martelly’s 100-Day Plan to Close six IDP Camps*. Institute for Justice & Democracy in Haiti, Bureau des Avocats Internationaux, University of San Francisco School of Law, at [www.HaitiJustice.org](http://www.HaitiJustice.org)

Published by the Haiti Support Group, 49 Stanger Road, London SE25 5LD

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Website: www.haitisupportgroup.org

Design: Smith+Bell (www.smithplusbell.com)

Editors: Anne McConnell, Andy Leak, Phillip Wearne and Christian Wisskirchen

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So what about the consultation and community involvement so prominent in Martelly's blueprint? For many in Stade Silvio Cator this amounted to nothing more than violence and threats. Some 35% of the former residents surveyed reported being physically harmed or threatened during what was simply a forced eviction by local authorities. Some 30% of residents reported destruction of their shelter or belongings in the process.

**The Alternative: Public, People, Both**

Obviously all this does not bode well—and not just for those in the six camps named, who are actually the chosen few. They number a fraction of the estimated 595,000 still living in the more than 900 IDP camps. Housing them or anyone else has, of course, never been a priority. Even though the value of housing lost in the earthquake was put at more than 50% of total losses, the Haitian government's request for funding for housing was only ever 8% of its total reconstruction budget proposal to donors.

Even Martelly's plan, ostensibly central-government controlled, does not do the logical thing – channel plans, projects, and procedures through the government's public housing authority, the EPPLS, the preferred option of the Housing Rights Coalition. It could build permanent social housing as it has done in the past, would be accountable to Haitians, could collect rents, and, as such, could leverage the hundreds of millions of donor dollars now being disbursed to develop a sizeable and sustainable social housing stock.

But while the IHRC has approved \$270m for housing projects, the EPPLS has, like so much else in the Haitian government, been completely bypassed, despite the oft-repeated donor mantra that the reconstruction must be Haitian government led and build public capacity in the process. The EPPLS has actually been effectively killed by the earthquake.



**T-shelters under construction. Transiting to what, where, for whom? The slums of tomorrow?**  
 Photo credit: Phillip Wearne, HSG

Its two officials died in their office and its minuscule budget has been effectively eliminated, a victim of the lack of budget support to the Haitian government in the first year after the earthquake.

The fact that the government did not even have a ministry for housing and urban development before the earthquake accounts for the state of Port-au-Prince when the ground started shaking. The fact that Haitians are still without such a ministerial authority today— five agencies that share some responsibilities related to housing now meet in an inter-ministerial committee, according to the Housing Rights Coalition – accounts for the lack of coordinated effort to take control from the donors and the NGOs.

One alternative leads back to where it should all have started: the people. Although cash handouts after disasters are not a panacea, the absence of anything else for so many may make them the obvious best option in Haiti. NGOs put the price of a T-shelter at anything between \$1500 and \$5000 per unit. Those towards the top end of that range are effectively permanent or convertibly-permanent homes.

However, convincing if anecdotal research shows that Haitians are individually building homes to the same specifications as the T-shelters at less than 20% of the NGO's costs. Most of the difference is not going into the Haitian economy. Could the aid dollar, pound or Euro go five times as far in Haitian hands? If so, as seems logical, it would mean more homes, more jobs, more cash in the local economy. The flip side is equally obvious: fewer IDPs, less gender-based violence, less cholera in fewer IDP camps. Win-win.

Perhaps everyone, government, NGOs, IHRC, should go back to where they should have started: consulting the homeless, trusting the people, mobilizing the energy and enterprise of ordinary Haitians who are endlessly active whichever way you look in Port-au-Prince. All it requires is the allocation of micro lots of land to kick-start the process. Set aside land, wherever, and they will come, as the one camp on government expropriated land at Corail Cesselesse proves (see Haiti Briefing 66). Is that so much to ask? ■



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