

What's next for Haiti?

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As someone born and raised in the Dominican Republic, which shares an island with Haiti, I feel sadness and magnified responsibility toward my homeland's neighbor.

I grew up around Haitians. Many worked on my family's lands. Others served as domestic workers, and many toiled in the sugarcane fields in our part of the country.

Those are the typical low-wage jobs Haitian immigrants have access to in the Dominican Republic, a country with a sordid and hypocritical relationship with Haitians. For decades, hundreds of thousands of Haitians have crossed the mountainous border to make a life for themselves and their families doing backbreaking work in my homeland.

The tenuous existence many Haitians endure in my country – undocumented and invisible, their Dominican-born children denied citizenship and access to basic social services, subsisting like unwanted squatters in deplorable shantytowns – reflects the hemisphere's general attitude toward Haiti.

Haiti exists in a nether region in our collective periphery, rotting from political corruption; agonizing from widespread health crises; and slowly fading from the world's consciousness.

But the massive earthquake that hit

Haiti – the hemisphere's poorest country – changed that forever. The destruction is staggering. Half the capital city of Port-au-Prince is in rubble. The latest estimate of fatalities was 150,000.

When the earthquake hit, 45,000 Americans were in Haiti. Undoubtedly, many were naturalized U.S. citizens who had returned to their homeland for visits or to retire. Many others were aid workers, volunteers, businessmen and missionaries. It's a testament to human generosity that so many Americans and other foreigners were there doing such humbling work.

But the real work of rebuilding must be undertaken not by individuals and philanthropic entities, but by world governments with the resources and mandates to make real, meaningful and lasting change.

The United States must take the lead and commandeer others to help, pledging capital, talent, materials and technical know-how.

Money is a good place to start. So far, the U.S. has pledged \$100 million in relief aid; other governments have pledged a few hundred million more.

The earthquake is the hemisphere's Katrina. And Haiti is our New Orleans.

We must not remain blind to the degradation of an entire country. We must not permit millions of our brothers and sisters to live without dignity. We must never again sustain such depraved indifference.

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