

## Guns over Basic Needs

EARTHQUAKES ARE RANDOM events. How many people they kill is predetermined. It's now futile to blame it on tectonic plates for the Haitian catastrophe. Ninety-nine percent of the death toll is attributable to poverty. On January 19, 2010, six days after the earthquake in Haiti the US Southern Command finally began to drop bottled water and food. In other words they allowed the situation to drift towards a graveyard. After all an earthquake is not just an earthquake. The same 7.0 tremor hitting San Francisco wouldn't kill nearly as many people as in Port-au-Prince. Strangely enough, America is now sending 10,000 troops and seems to be prioritising "security" over much more urgent life-and-death needs. This is in addition to the increase of 35,000 UN troops scheduled to arrive.

On January 18, the World-renowned humanitarian group *Doctors Without Borders* complained that a plane carrying its portable hospital unit was re-routed by the US military through the Dominican Republic. This would cost a crucial 24 hours and an unknown number of lives.

To understand the United States government's obsession with "security concerns," one must look at the recent history of Washington's involvement there.

Long before the earthquake, Haiti's plight has been comparable to that of many homeless people on city streets in the United States: too poor and too black to have the same effective constitutional and legal rights as other citizens.

In 2002, when a US-backed military coup temporarily toppled the elected government of Venezuela, most governments in the hemisphere responded quickly and helped force the return of democratic rule.

But two years later, when Haiti's democratically elected president Jean-Bertrand Aristide was kidnapped by the United States and flown to exile in South Africa, the response was muted.

Unlike the two centuries of looting and pillage of Haiti since its founding by a slave revolt in 1804, the brutal occupation by US Marines from 1915-1934, the countless atrocities under dictatorships aided and abetted by Washington, the 2004 coup cannot be dismissed as "ancient history." It was just six years ago, and it is directly relevant to what is happening there now.

The United States, together with Canada and France, conspired openly for four years to topple Haiti's elected government, cutting off almost all international aid in order to destroy the economy and make the country ungovernable. They succeeded.

For those who wonder why there are no Haitian government institutions to help with the earthquake relief efforts, this is a big reason. Or why there are three million people crowded into the area where the earthquake hit.

US policy over the years also helped destroy Haitian agriculture, for example, by forcing the import of subsidized US rice and wiping out thousands of Haitian rice farmers.

Washington's fear of democracy in Haiti may explain why America is now sending 10,000 troops and prioritising 'security' over other needs.□