

Violence Escalates in Haiti as U.N. Promises Help



Residents flee homes in Port-au-Prince to escape clashes between armed gangs. Photo: Odelyn Joseph

In Midst of Crisis, MFP Reaches Ten Thousand Patients Milestone

Haiti: 2023

The situation in Haiti deteriorated dramatically in 2023. Violence from armed gangs terrorized all of metropolitan Port-au-Prince (PAP) and spilled over to neighboring regions. Fearing for their lives, 200,000 residents fled from their homes to seek safety in hastily built, inadequate shelters. Kidnappings, murders, and sexual assaults on women and girls have become commonplace.

The Haitian Government, the Judiciary, and State Police continue to be unable to control the rampage of heavily-armed criminal gangs who act with impunity.

People living in the countryside have escaped most of the violence. However, political instability, inflation, and the inability to transport

food and goods because of road blockades have taken a toll. More than half of the population living in rural areas now live in extreme poverty. Hunger, leading to acute childhood malnutrition, is the worst in Haiti's history.

Despite this grim picture, there is a glimmer of hope. The U.N. has passed a resolution to deploy a Multinational Security Support (MSS) Mission to Haiti to re-establish security and bolster police capabilities. The MSS will be led by Kenya and composed of police from nations in Africa and the Caribbean. Most Haitians, although wary of a U.N. intervention, welcome any effort to restore security to their family's lives.

MFP's Health Program in Rural Haiti.

Throughout this period of unprecedented violence
(continued next page)



MFP nurses convert rural schoolroom into a women's health clinic. MFP caregivers have treated thousands of women in remote mountainous hamlets.

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the MFP Women's Health Program in Gros Morne has never closed its doors. **We have reached a milestone by caring for more than ten thousand patients** since the program was initiated in 2010. The ten thousandth patient, Madame Bazile Celania (see photo), a 52-year-old woman from Mioc, celebrated the occasion with the MFP staff at Alma Mater Hospital.

"This MFP achievement demonstrates that life-saving progress is possible, even in a period of severe civil disruption."

The MFP Women's Health Program offers free medical care to patients at Alma Mater Hospital and at 19 dispensaries in remote rural villages. The comprehensive program treats women with a wide range of gynecological conditions including: cervical cancer, sexually transmitted infections (including HIV/AIDS), high risk pregnancies, as well as patients suffering from advanced cancer. Our nurses and community health workers are committed to help our patients maintain a healthy lifestyle.

Dr. Michael Viola, Director of MFP commented on reaching this milestone, "During this period of insecurity from the threat of armed criminal gangs, it is critical that humanitarian assistance not retreat from Haiti but continue to support Haitian health institutions. This MFP achievement demonstrates that **life-saving progress is possible**, even in a period of severe civil disruption."

While many doctors and nurses are leaving Haiti because of safety concerns, the MFP program has been exceptionally stable. We continue to train nurses to treat not only our patients, but to ensure there are adequate numbers of skilled nurses to care for women throughout Haiti.



Madame Celania, Women's Health Clinic patient, with head nurse, Ms. Erlöse Cerfrère.

In Remembrance: Cheryl Ann Kennedy, MD



Dr. Cheryl Kennedy with MFP team in Bosnia.

The Executive Board, staff, and volunteers of Medicine For Peace was saddened to learn of the recent passing of our dear friend and co-worker Dr. Cheryl Kennedy. Cheryl was Professor and Vice-Chairman of Psychiatry at the Rutgers New Jersey Medical School, in Newark and a longtime MFP Board Member and volunteer.

An early Medicine For Peace volunteer, Cheryl helped plan and initiate the much-praised **MFP Bosnian Children's Project** in Kozarac, Bosnia. Kozarac was one of the first Muslim towns ethnically cleansed in the Bosnian War. Cheryl recognized the desperate condition of the children who survived the massacre. She helped to transform the Kozarac school into a safe, healing space for the traumatized children.

The celebrated Sarajevo newspaper, *Oslobodjenje*, praised the MFP program in an article entitled "Life Returns to Kozarac", describing it as a model of cooperation between Bosnian women and American relief workers.

Cheryl had a large, confident personality. Her hearty laugh gave comfort to those around her, even the most traumatized. In the midst of danger, she had a way of making people feel safe.

Most of all, Cheryl was a constant force, whether she was caring for victims after the 9/11 tragedy, pleading the case of a tortured asylum seeker before an immigration judge, or helping Bosnian women to care for their troubled children.

Cheryl spent her entire clinical career at New Jersey College of Medicine and Dentistry. As one might expect, she focused on the problems of the urban poor: patients with HIV/AIDS, people recovering from addiction, and victims of violence.



Drs. Cheryl Kennedy and Michael Viola in Bosnia.

Foni Bo School: Educating Haiti's Future Leaders

Only thirty percent of children in Haiti finish primary school. Lack of funds and duties at home are the main reason for the high dropout rates. However, for many parents in Gros Morne, the Foni Bo school is a safe and nurturing place that may lift their children out of poverty.

The school educates six hundred children from pre-school to the ninth grade. It has a number of model programs including “*Haiti Reads*” which re-enforces reading skills in Creole and French in lower grades. The well-equipped computer lab prepares children for life-long computational learning. We are proud that 100% of six-graders passed the National Certification exam.

The students look forward to a hot, nutritious

lunch each day. The rice, beans, porridge and eggs are all locally sourced. MFP partially funds the health-promoting lunch program which for many children will be the only full meal of the day.



Students take turns cleaning dishes after lunch.

MFP Reaffirms Opposition to Landmines and Cluster Bombs



Bosnian children who stepped on landmines.

On July 10, the U.S. Government announced a \$800 million deal in which it **will supply Ukraine with thousands of cluster bombs**. This action undermines the Convention On Cluster Munitions drawn up in Dublin in 2008 and signed by more than 120 countries that prohibits the production, use, or stockpiling of these deadly weapons.

A cluster shell releases tens to hundreds of exploding bomblets in midair over a wide area, many of which fail to explode. The unexploded bomblets act like landmines, **threatening civilians for decades**. Children are particularly at risk because the bomblets look like toys.

MFP Director, Dr. Michael Viola, commented, “**We strongly oppose this action** which is a flagrant rejection of the worldwide movement to protect civilians from these horrifying weapons. We encourage more courageous officials in the United States to urge the government to sign the Convention.”

MFP is a long-time member of the **International Campaign to Ban Landmines and the Cluster Munitions Coalition (ICBL-CMC)** who work for a world free of landmines, cluster munitions, and other explosive remnants of war. The ICBL was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1997.



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