

Mr. President,

I don't know where you get your information about Haiti, but I find your characterization appalling.

My interaction with the Haitian people over the past four years has taught me they are some of the most courageous, creative, compassionate, resilient and generous people on this planet. They meet the challenges of life with strength and dignity: they treat one another with respect and graciousness. I am honored to call them friends and colleagues.

Courageous: In Gros Morne where a group of elderly and disabled people were without shelter and food and no means to provide for themselves, they banded together to be present to one another and as much as possible care for each other. Soon others noticed their caring ways and decided to join them in making life better. Today they are living in Maison Bon Samaritan, a retirement facility with daily meals, health care, recreational activities, gardening and all manner of things for life to flourish within and among them.

Creative: The Agronomy Staff at Grepen Center (two full-time trained Haitian Agronomists and two trained Haitian Agronomy Technicians) invented a method for ridding the sweet potatoes of a destructive weevil. Immediately they set about sharing that method with local farmers. Those farmers are now on the way to returning production to thirteen metric tons (28,660 lbs.) of sweet potatoes annually.

Compassionate: Chemin Lavi Miyo, translated Pathway to a Better Life, is a program directed and implemented by Haitians for Haitians and sponsored by Fonkoze, an organization which provides services to the poor of Haiti. This program provides women who are ultra-poor with tools for creating a better life for themselves and their children. In eighteen months each woman has two successful income-producing activities, a safe, secure home and can feed and send children to school. One of the key elements in the program is the caseworker assigned to accompany the women. Once a week for eighteen months the caseworker and woman meet to review progress and create new steps to take. Walking side-by-side creating conditions for people to thrive.

May you be inspired by these powerful expressions by the Haitian people of what is best in us as human beings.

Sister Kathy Thornton

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