



Haiti President Michel Martelly's Global Campaign to 'Build a Better Haiti' Looks Promising



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When it comes to Haiti, Haitian President Michel Martelly prides himself on his ability to lead with his heart to create positive change for his country and its people from within. Since his inauguration on May 14, 2011, Martelly has worked tirelessly with Haitians, the wider diaspora and the international donor community to cultivate long-term investment in Haiti that would support Haitian-owned businesses, ensure rapid job creation and sustained economic development.

Martelly's work to bring structural improvements to Haiti and permanently change its image from a country looking for handouts to one that is an equal and viable trade partner, is impressive in light of facing challenges from Haiti's established political elite that still view his previous lack of experience in politics as reason enough to block his efforts to move Haiti forward.

Last week while at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, to meet with potential investors, Martelly discussed his views on a national security force for Haiti; a possible pardon for former President Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier; and his push to reverse Haiti's brain drain with an appeal to the global Haitian diaspora that they return "home" and be a part of Haiti's future.

Even as a candidate, Martelly indicated his desire to recreate the Haitian army (disbanded by former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in 1994 after they overthrew him from power in a 1991 coup), despite meeting disapproval from the U.S. and the international donor community who fear another round of human rights abuses and corruption from a misguided security force. According to Martelly, taking steps to revive the Haitian army would bring

Haiti closer to ending its dependency on UN Peacekeeping troops – especially in light of evidence that links the cholera outbreak shortly after the 2010 earthquake to one of the troopers.

Despite calls from international human rights activists and victims of the Duvalier regime to try Baby Doc as a war criminal, Martelly has continued to voice his belief that he expressed as a candidate, which advocates for all parties involved to forgive the past in order to use the present for national reconciliation and create a self-sufficient future for Haiti and its people.

Also last week, Haitian First Lady Sophia Martelly announced the start of “Aba Grangou,” (English translation: “Down With Hunger”) an initiative led by the Haitian government to feed approximately 2.2 million children throughout Haiti. In addition to this announcement, the Haitian government signed an agreement with the European Union to build highways between Port-au-Prince and Hinche in order to invite more economic investment in Haiti through creating better access for improved commerce and exchange between the two regions.

Martelly’s frequent use of social media sites like Facebook and Twitter as a way to communicate with Haitians and the larger global diaspora about the work of his administration to unite and serve the Haitian people give his government increased visibility at a critical time as the country works to reclaim their sovereignty from the international donor community and NGOs.

Martelly’s energy, optimism and faith in Haiti’s future are the right combination of leadership needed for a country that has been traumatized by political leaders who often put their own gain before that of the people. While diplomatic and gracious in his communication to the international community, Martelly remains firm in his belief that Haiti must take the lead in its own development, and can no longer be crippled by letting external entities decide its fate.

Haiti’s global diaspora is paying attention. Perhaps Martelly will get his wish for a good portion of the diaspora to “come home” and invest in the homeland.