
Devastation in Haïti – Architects Called Upon for Mobilization and Solidarity

Montreal, January 14, 2010 – Haiti has been struck once again by disaster, as an earthquake of magnitude 7 struck around 5pm on January 12th causing many buildings in the nation’s capital to collapse, including the presidential palace and the UN mission headquarters. Hotel Montana, one of the most reputable tourist destinations in the country, was also destroyed, along with many homes, public buildings and hospitals. Emergency Architects is sending a team of professionals comprised of experts from France, the West Indies and Canada to evaluate the damages for the safety of the people and provide aid for the victims.

One month ago, prior to this catastrophe, Emergency Architects of Canada, in collaboration with the City of Montreal, began its first mission in Haïti. On December 13, 2009, Quebec architects Jean Laberge (City of Montréal), Jean-Paul Boudreau and Claude Robert (Jodoin Lamarre Pratte architects) arrived in Port-au-Prince to prepare a feasibility study and preliminary design to rehabilitate the old Simbi Continental Hotel, to create dwelling units and revitalize the surrounding site. It is safe to say that this building, that already contained some 300 families (without running water or electricity) has sustained a similar fate as most of the other buildings in the area, and it goes without saying that the mission that was just taking form has just taken on a new form and scale.

Mr. Patrick Coulombel, president and founder of Emergency Architects of France, along with Quebec Architect Jean-Paul Boudreau, member of the Canadian section of Emergency Architects, are attempting to make their way to the site to evaluate the situation and begin securing affected buildings with their team of colleagues in collaboration with the mayor of Port-au-Prince, the group met last December. Another objective is to quickly establish a permanent Emergency Architects base in Haïti to welcome and accommodate, over the coming months, the teams that will undertake and realise the reconstruction mission. “We need to stop evaluating the situation and producing reports. It is time to act. What the people need is a place to live in dignity and safety. A roof, a table, a few chairs, a clean place to eat and sleep, a toilet, a canteen, and a school for the children,” commented Jean-Paul Boudreau in a radio interview this morning.

Architects worldwide are being called upon to mobilize to help with the most important construction site on earth for a population that desperately needs it. The mission aims to build or rebuild new infrastructure with appropriate materials and methods for a seismic zone that is devoid of resources. Deployed professionals will work with locals to share their knowledge and will get to work to help rebuild walls and lives, little by little. In a demographic context where 65% of the population is under the age of 18, it is urgent to act to offer women and children a home, as minimal as it may be. Buildings and infrastructure destined for public facilities such as health services, food and education are also as important and urgent.

Mobilized architects will work in collaboration with other non-governmental organizations (NGO), the Haitian government and local building professionals (architects, engineers, etc.). Teams will be called upon to work in turn over the next five years, if not more.

The humanitarian mission of Emergency Architects in Haïti is advocated and supported by the International Union of Architects (IUA). Emergency Architects is inviting the community to come together in solidarity to help this population that has suffered devastation, pain and misery. To do this, architects, engineers and anyone sensible to the fate of this population, are invited to transmit their monetary donations for the reconstruction of Haïti. Canadians can **donate** online at www.emergency-architects.ca or by sending a check to Emergency Architects of Canada, 1825 boul. René-Lévesque West, Montreal (Quebec) H3H 1R4. M. Bernard McNamara, president and founder of the Canadian section of Emergency Architects, is asking Canadian architects and building engineers to show their interest and availability to be a part of the mission in Haïti by writing to cgiard@architectes-urgence.ca . Information sessions will be organized over the following weeks in order to plan and organize the presence of Emergency Architects in Haiti and its humanitarian action in the short, medium and long term.

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