

Haiti Fact Sheet

LOCATION: Haiti is located 700 miles southeast of Miami, just 100 minutes air travel time, occupying the western third of the island of Hispaniola, which it shares with the Dominican Republic. Haiti is only 60 miles from Cuba.

SIZE: 10,714 square miles, or 1/4 the size of Virginia (about the size of Maryland).

POPULATION: Approximately 8.2 million people. Over 1.5 million live abroad, mostly in the U.S. and Canada, with an estimated additional number (varying between 450,000 to 750,000) living in the neighboring Dominican Republic.

GOVERNMENT: Independent Republic since 1804. Since then there has been instability in the government with many factions vying for power. Before the first democratic elections were held in December 1990, Francois Duvalier and then his son, Jean-Claude, ran a brutal dictatorship. When the elections occurred in 1990 the turnout of eligible voters exceeded 60% and Jean Bertrand Aristide was elected President. A nonviolent transfer of power from President Aristide to newly elected Rene Preval took place Feb. 7, 1996. Aristide was re-elected President Nov. 26, 2000. The Parliament of 83 Delegates and 27 Senators was elected in May 2000. President Aristide was removed from Haiti in February 2004. An interim Government stayed in power until spring of 2006 when Rene Preval was elected as President of Haiti.

RELIGION: 80% Roman Catholic; 10% various Protestant mainline churches. Evangelical Christians are increasingly becoming evident. Vodou remains a part of Haitian culture stemming from African roots and the government officially recognizes the Vodouist Federation.

LANGUAGE: Creole and French are official but everyone speaks Creole. All of Haitian law is in French. Some grassroots groups and the clergy are learning English.

EDUCATION: Free public education is sporadic and non-existent in many rural areas. Only 5-10% of rural children ever complete elementary school. 80% of the population is illiterate.

LIVING CONDITIONS: Only 15% of the rural population has access to safe water. Most families do not have electricity or running water. Sanitary facilities as we know them, sewage disposal, flush toilets, etc., are almost nonexistent. 2.4 million people live in urban slums. In 1999 the UN designated Haiti the 3rd hungriest nation in the world behind Somalia and Afghanistan.

LIFE EXPECTANCY: 54 years. For some labor intensive, 45 years.

ECONOMY: Average per capita income is less than \$400, closer to \$150 in the rural areas. Less than 1% of the population controls the majority of the wealth. Fewer than 200 families control the entire economy. There is little trade between Haiti and other countries. Much of the food for survival, such as rice, is imported at low prices because of subsidies to US farmers by the U.S. government.