

# THE HAITIAN TIMES

BRIDGING THE GAP

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**HAITI**

## Year after Haiti quake, housing need still high as government fails to act

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A tent city in Cavaillon, a commune in the Southern Department, a year after a 7.2 magnitude earthquake struck Haiti's southern region. Photo credit: Man Dodo Humanitarian Foundation

Six months after a local pastor built a shelter in Cavaillon for Olucia Jean-Louis and 14 others left homeless by the [earthquake](#) that devastated Haiti's southern region last year, three men broke into the temporary home. During the April 25 break-in, the thieves made off with 10 of the cooking pots Jean-Louis sells to make a living in the Southern Department commune.

When the trio attempted to sell the pots later that day, Jean-Louis, with the help of other residents, detained one of the men and delivered him to the police station. In retaliation, Jean-Louis said, the two other thieves set her home made of plywoods on fire.

“I was one inch away from going crazy after seeing that I was going to live under the same conditions I was in right after the earthquake,” Jean-Louis said recently.

To keep going, Jean-Louis then built a small home of metal sheets where the shelter once stood, similar to the one she had built next to her house that collapsed on that harrowing day the earth shook — August 14, 2021. Then in May, Jean-Louis found another lifeline when the [Man Dodo Humanitarian Foundation](#), a Florida based nonprofit charity, selected Jean-Louis' family to live in one of the 12 houses they plan to build in Cavaillon. Three houses have been built so far and the families will move in on Aug. 21.

“If I were God, I would've pushed the date forward,” said Jean-Louis, excited to move into her new home.

Jean-Louis, as harrowing as her experience has been, is among the more fortunate. One year since the earthquake, thousands of the Great South's impacted residents still have not received assistance to leave the structures made of metal sheets or tents meant to serve as temporary homes. Numerous schools, churches, other structures and roads have yet to be repaired or rebuilt.

To exacerbate matters, residents said, unemployment and lack of food have set in and burglars regularly steal what little there is. They are also cut off from traditional economic activities as [gang-led blockades](#) gravely restrict access to the capital for business, school and general travel.

Local and international organizations, many of them nonprofits, have stepped in to help residents rebuild. However, their efforts are far from the \$2 billion large-scale reconstruction effort the Haitian government estimated needing for the recovery. To many, the lack of recovery is a saddening repeat of a similar outcome seen after the [2010 earthquake](#).

## **Haitian government condemned for not helping**

The 7.2 magnitude earthquake that struck Haiti's southwestern regions that summer day shocked a country already reeling from the [assassination](#) of its president one month prior. In the aftermath, authorities reported, the natural disaster had killed about 2,200 people and injured 13,000 across cities such as Les Cayes, Fonds-des-Nègres, Saint-Louis du Sud, Cavaillon and more. The [United Nations](#) reported that 137,000 houses, 1,250 schools, 95 hospitals and roads and bridges were destroyed.

The main road from Les Cayes to Duchity, which was damaged and strewn with rubble during the quake, has not been repaired or cleaned, according to residents of Duchity.

The Haitian government had estimated it would cost nearly \$2 billion to repair all the damage, according to the [United Nations](#). In February, the Haitian government submitted a proposal to the United Nations to help reconstruction for the next four years and received pledges of [\\$600 million](#) from international donors on Feb. 17. France also provided about [\\$25 million](#) for development initiatives in 2022, the Ministry of Europe and of Foreign Affairs said in an Aug. 12 [note](#).

It is unclear how the funds are being used, allocated or received. Government officials, including Minister of Economy and of Finances Michel Patrick Boisvert and Haiti's Ministry Public Infrastructure, Transport and Communication ([MPTPC](#)) agency, did not answer The Haitian Times' emails and phone calls requesting interviews.

Many residents bemoan the Haitian government's lack of tangible support to the region.

"One year after the earthquake, nothing serious was done," said Emmanuel Charles, Man Dodo's national coordinator, referring specifically to Cavaillon. "I haven't seen any intervention at all from the State."

Residents in other areas echo his observations, saying the government has been absent during the recovery process for the most part.

"There hasn't been any changes really," said Jean Vionel Caton, administrator of OFATMA Hospital in Les Cayes. "But in the city, like in Saint-Louis du Sud and other places, some organizations did little construction for the people."

## **Nonprofits lay building blocks**

Among the non-profit organizations that have stepped in to build earthquake-resistant homes for some residents is [Love a Child](#) (LAC). The nonprofit based in [Fond Parisien](#), 25 miles east of Port-au-Prince, aimed to build 100 houses — at a cost of \$9,000 each — for residents south of [Anse-A-Veau](#). So far, they've completed 60 and plan to double the construction teams building these houses of [earthquake-proof design](#).

"We've already started digging 30 or 40 more foundations for 30 or 40 more houses," said Bobby Burdette, LAC co-founder, referring to his

wife, Sherry. “We may go further. We don’t know yet. We’ll see how it goes. We’ll just keep on building.”

But gangs blocking Martissant, the town at the south of Port-au-Prince that is a gateway to and from the south, has limited LAC’s efforts.

“There’s been a food shortage and then a diesel shortage — everything because of the gangs that blocked the way. And so we buy our food in the port, off the ships there,” Burdette said.

Over in Cavaillon, Man Dodo plans to build 12 earthquake-resistant 50 meter square homes with two rooms, a living room, a dining room, a bathroom and an outdoor kitchen. Each home cost \$12,500 to build, according to Man Dodo. Jean-Louis often spends time in the front yard of the home that she will receive.



An earthquake-resistant 50 meter square home Man Dodo Humanitarian Foundation built in Cavaillon, a commune in the Southern Department, for residents whose home collapsed after the 2021 earthquake. Photo credit: Man Dodo Humanitarian Foundation

“It’s really beautiful,” Jean-Louis said via WhatsApp, while sitting in the front yard of the house. “I always said I didn’t know when I would build a home to sleep in. Maybe it’s because I always do good, the Lord blesses me.”

## **Temporary homes unlivable long-term**

Meanwhile, in [Charpentier](#), an area of Les Cayes, Melissa Mauthrin, 19, does not know when she will leave the metal sheets home where she and her family live. Every day, once the sun is up, the family must leave the shelter because the interior becomes unbearably hot. Any time it rains, water pours into the home.

“It’s going to take time but I think one day, things will get better,” Mathurin, a high school student, said. “I don’t feel good about the State not helping, but maybe we’re just out of luck. Maybe they just haven’t spent the time to go to every small area in the city.”

Some people who have been in contact with government officials said they have not received help. Sonise Elysee of [Duchity](#), a commune in the Grand-Anse Department, said MPTPC told her rebuilding her house would cost an amount equivalent to USD \$6,000, which she does not have.

“I will have to find a way to build a more solid shelter to stay with my kids, because every time it rains, everything gets wet,” Elysee, a single mother of 10, said. “I don’t believe any [government] authorities will do anything for me.”















*Images of some temporary homes in Cavaillon. Photo credit: Man Dodo Humanitarian Foundation*

As far as rebuilding schools and health centers, foreign organizations are also leading the way. [Miyamoto Relief](#), part of [Miyamoto International](#), a U.S.-based earthquake engineering company, is providing the engineering, construction management, and quality control of Foundation Tous Ensemble's Rehabilitation Center (FONTEN) in Les Cayes. The reconstruction project is estimated to cost about \$100,000, according to Kit Miyamoto, the CEO.

Miyamoto International, as part of a contract with MPTPC, taught 15,000 homeowners in nine different cities how to “build back safer” with sustainable supplies.

“Homeowners are knowledgeable on the approximate cost for a wall, including sustainable materials for their homes so they can defend their interest and protect their investment,” Guilaine Victor, country manager of Miyamoto Haiti, said in a press release.



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J.O. Haselhof is the author of “Give & Take: Doing Our Damnedest NOT to be Another Charity in Haiti.” She co-founded “Yonn Ede Lot” (One Helping Another), a nonprofit that partnered with volunteer groups in La Montagne (“Lamontay”), Haiti from 2007-2013. She writes and lives in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.