

World

Haitian officials accused of ignoring aid corruption

PM Craig McMurtrie

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A prominent politician in Haiti has accused the national government of ignoring aid corruption in the aftermath of January's devastating earthquake.

National assembly deputy Steven Benoit told PM that a lack of urgency over the release of land for transitional housing was also putting Haiti's recovery at risk.

Mr Benoit, who was once the brother-in-law of Haitian president Rene Preval, says that two months after the quake displaced Haitians are watching the black market grow fat off the back of the international aid effort.

"No-one's telling them when they might have a decent shelter and when the food and water might be getting to them," Mr Benoit said.

"And they know some of this food that is supposed to go through them is being sold in the streets.

"The tents are being sold on the black market already and we have some people that are stocking piles of rice and beans to sell eventually in the market. It's a sad situation."



PHOTO: [The Red Cross say they have nowhere to build transitional houses for displaced Haitians because of confusion over land rights.](#)

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Mr Benoit says Haiti's gangs have been quick to resume business after the earthquake.

He says the gangs operate with impunity, intercepting aid convoys with the help of information from corrupt government officials.

"From the airport to the warehouse, the trucks are already making a first stop and most of the time you have people close to the government who are doing this," he said.

"These are people actually from the government who have their little gangs, but it's been like that for 200 years in Haiti.

"They have their little gangs on the side and those gangs are operating with immunity because they know they are covered by high-ranking officials."

Building delays

The issue of finding and releasing land so work can begin on building transitional homes is also causing concern.

The International Red Cross is shipping in materials but spokesman Alex Wynter says they are not making progress.

"The chief constraint that we face at the moment, in terms of how quickly we can expand, is land," he said.

"Our schedule for procurement and construction of transitional housing materials has us bringing in materials for 1,000 houses before the end of this month.

"But we still don't have anywhere to put them."

Mr Benoit says the process is frustratingly slow because there is no effective land management in the country and no proper record of ownership.

"This is why you have shanty towns all over circling Port-au-Prince," he said.

"Where anybody finds a piece of land, at night they go in with two pieces of cardboard and two pieces of wood and they start building a house. Before you know it in three or four days you have a little house.

"So now we have a government who is in dire need of land, but they have no access because they don't know what they own."

Mr Benoit says he expects Haitians will take to the streets in revolt soon and warns that it is likely to turn violent.

The Haitian prime minister's office did not respond to PM's requests for an interview.

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