

Pastor finds Canadian aid for sale on Haiti's black market

BY DAVE ROGERS, OTTAWA CITIZEN FEBRUARY 8, 2010

Rogers Chocolates



People go on with their lives at Petionville Club IDP camp, where more than 50,000 people have moved into makeshift tents when they lost their homes in the January 12 earthquake in Port-au-Prince Feb. 7, 2010.

Photograph by: REUTERS/Sophia Paris,

A former Ottawa pastor trying to rebuild an orphanage for children who lost everything in the catastrophic Jan. 12 earthquake that levelled Haiti says he is buying Canadian food aid on the black market that flourishes in the country.

Ismorin Noel, who operates Orphelinat de la Judee in the coastal city of Gonaives with his wife, Louise, rushed to Port-au-Prince after the earthquake, hoping to rescue youngsters who have no homes or surviving families.

This week, Ismorin plans to move 30 Port-au-Prince orphans from a collapsed children's shelter to the orphanage in Gonaives, north of Port-au-Prince. The six-hour bus trip will cost about \$100 Canadian.

Unfortunately, the orphanage Ismorin and Louise founded in 2004 was already heavily damaged by six hurricanes and tropical storms and suffered more damage during the earthquake.

The roof is partly collapsed, the kitchen is a shambles, many buildings in the city north of Port-au-Prince have been destroyed, malaria is a problem and there are open sewers everywhere.

The orphanage, which houses 28 children, faces food shortages and increasing building material costs. Louise, who hopes to return to Haiti from her home in Gatineau, Que., said her husband buys the Canadian food aid before other black market vendors grab it for resale in the local market.

"They don't have enough food, clothing or shoes," Louise said. "Food is very hard to get now at the market.

"They have to buy rice donated by Canada because it is available only on the black market. When you see a helicopter dropping food, men fight over it and then sell it in the market."

Louise said everything for sale in the market in Gonaives was first donated. She added a plan to give food aid to women, that is now under way in Port-au-Prince would deliver more food directly to families instead of the black market.

The Kiwanis Club, the Royal Canadian Legion and the French Cafe in Manotick, near Ottawa, are trying to raise \$100,000 to rebuild the Noels' orphanage near Ennery, a higher and safer location northeast of Gonaives.

Other supporters of the orphanage include the Ottawa charity Re-Imagine United, a church in Austin, Tex. and Ottawa's Ecole elementaire publique Michaelle-Jean, which donated 100 boxes of clothing, shoes and school materials.

Louise, a health care worker at Ottawa's Montfort Hospital, who came to Canada in 1992 from France, and now lives in Gatineau, established the orphanage because she wanted to rescue abandoned children. She is originally from Haiti.

"When I was growing up I saw a lot of poverty," Louise said. "Girls would get pregnant during carnival, abort themselves later and leave the babies in plastic bags on the ground. I always wanted to save those babies.

"There are now 28 children there now. Fifty orphans needed a home after the collapse of the orphanage in Port-au-Prince, but Ismorin could take only 30."

Haitian officials didn't object to the move, but Ismorin has had trouble with child traffickers, Louise said. One man demanded \$50 for one supposed orphan and another asked \$3,000 for "plenty of children."

Ismorin refused to pay and moved on.

Lucie Demers, a spokeswoman for Re-Imagine United, said all the children who go to the Gonaives orphanage will remain in Haiti and won't be available for adoption.

The new orphanage is designed for 65 children but may have to accommodate up to 100 temporarily. Demers said the charity isn't yet registered with the Canada Revenue Agency but all donations are used for the orphanage and nothing is spent on administration.

Orphanage supporters have raised \$20,000 of the \$100,000 construction cost but within a few weeks they hope to find volunteers who will design and build a new home for the children.

People can contribute online to Orphelinat de la Judee at www.reimagineunited.org.

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