Haiti: 'The Republic of NGOs'  

As Haiti looks to the future, reliance on foreign aid is questioned

Alanna Wallace

November 24, 2010 1:01 PM

“[Its government exists only in name, not in substance],” said Patricia Adams of Probe International in regards to Haiti, as she addressed a small gathering at the University of Waterloo at a conference held by the Institute for Liberal Studies on Nov. 19.

“Though Haiti occupies a seat at the United Nations, it doesn’t deserve one,” she continued. “It is not a truly independent state.”

Adams’ lecture examined the nation, which was ravaged by an earthquake last January that killed approximately 300,000 people and left 1.5 million homeless.

She pointed the blame largely at foreign aid and those agencies that supply monetary aid — explaining Haiti’s long, turbulent and corrupt past.

“History shows that the more aid Haiti has received, the more Haiti has fallen,” Adams said. “New foreign aid is not going to fix the fundamental problems that plague the country — it will only make those problems worse.”

Categorizing Haiti as a failed state, Adams described the small Caribbean nation, which shares a border with the Dominican Republic, as a “predatory democracy, where those in power pillage the state and treat government positions as entrepreneurial opportunities.”

Again, Adams turned to the problem of Haiti’s dependence on foreign aid,
which has created a vicious cycle whereby the “government is unconcerned with nation-building, with institution-building, or with post-conflict resolution ... content to let outsiders dictate its future.”

“In the end the nine million citizens in Haiti abide under an absentee administration with no control, no input or responsibility over their own body politic,” said Adams.

The effect that foreign aid has on the politics of Haiti can be tracked through the overwhelming amount of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that operate within the country.

Having the most NGOs per capita of any other nation, Haiti is home to what Adams called a "parallel state" of non-government actors, which include big charities such as Doctors Without Borders.

She said one estimate states that 70 per cent of aid flowing through Haiti comes from NGO operations and “may account for as much as one quarter of Haiti’s gross domestic product."

This means Haiti’s development is dependent upon charity.

Most important was likely Adams’ suggestions for ways to break the cycle of dependence for Haiti.

The first included making the nation a UN trusteeship; the second included executing an existing strategic plan set fourth by 60 Haitians.

Both the third and forth proposals included the United States taking on various administrative, judicial and legislative authorities, with Haiti giving up certain degrees of sovereignty.

Without suggesting which option would be best, Adams stressed that the decision of how to rebuild and restore Haiti should be executed through democratic process.

“Only Haitian citizens can decide that and they can really only decide that after they’ve had a chance to debate it in a secure environment, in an open environment, said Adams. "To look at all the various options and to vote."