

## HUMAN RIGHTS AFTERSHOCKS: HAITI

*Intercultural Human Rights Law Review Annual Symposium*

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### THE PRESIDENT'S WELCOME ADDRESS

REV. MONSIGNOR FRANKLYN M. CASALE\*

Good morning everybody and welcome to St. Thomas University!

It is our longstanding tradition that each year we bring experts, scholars, and practitioners, to assess and evaluate cutting-edge issues that relate to the *Catholic Intellectual Tradition* and our *Mission*. The life and the dignity of every human being across borders, cultures, or religions is at the core of both.

This time, we focus on Haiti, the development of the island and the welfare of its people. The conference is hosted by our student leaders and members of the *Intercultural Human Rights Law Review*. I welcome all of you students, faculty, community guests, and above all, you experts who are joining us today from different parts of the U.S. in order to review the laws and policies that govern, and could help find better solutions to the problems related to Haiti.

For quite some time, we at St. Thomas are proud to have had several major involvements with our Haitian brothers and sisters.

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\* President, St. Thomas University.

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One in particular, which St. Thomas University, The Miami Herald, and American Airlines founded, is the trade school, Haiti Tec, in Port-au-Prince. I have served on the Governor's Haiti Advisory Group and the Board of Fonkoze, USA. Our students and faculty are engaged in Haiti's Northwest Department in three global solidarity projects. These long-term, sustainable, social, economic, and environmental development projects are working to empower local communities and build the economic infrastructure.

The three projects include the Café Cocano Fair-Trade Coffee Project, the Atelier Thevenet Haitian Artisan, and the STU/Port-de-Paix Solar Energy Initiative. These efforts in Haiti advocacy and social-development date to the 1980's, and build upon a 30-year sister-diocese partnership between the Archdiocese of Miami and the diocese of Port-de-Paix.

This experience uniquely positions us for more work in Haiti with an array of contacts, a nuanced cultural understanding, and knowledge of the complexity of working in a Haitian context. Today, you become part of this legacy.

Haiti is a country that has constantly experienced political upheaval, civil unrests, devastating health crises, severe environmental degradation, and annual torrential hurricanes. The January earthquake was the last straw, reducing much of its capital to rubble, and dignified sustainable human life, as we know it, seemed to be a far away reality. Today, the country is still struggling in many respects: people are displaced, children disappear, health problems increase, the government drags its feet over decision-making, there is only scant reconstruction, crime is returning, foreign aid has been collected but not reached the people because of unproductive aid policies.

This has to change. In addition, the outpouring of attention and resources to the country has all but disappeared, and unfortunately, the hearts and minds of those who first responded are now concerned with other things. I pledge however, that this University will

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not be forgetting Haiti. We will continue to be partners in development in whatever way we possibly can. This discussion that we are having today, I hope, will surface even more solutions to the issues in Haiti and will refocus all our attention with more intensity than ever.

I thank you for your presence and wish you successful proceedings.

God bless!