

## HAITI: THREAT OF NATURAL DISASTER/HIGH SEISMIC RISK OVER PORT-AU-PRINCE

On September 25, 2008, *Le Matin*, a Haitian daily paper published an article written by Phoenix Delacroix to warn the Haitian government and educate the public on the possibility for a 7.2 magnitude quake to strike Port-au-prince. Ayiti Gouvènans translated the whole article into English and invites you to read it.

"All the conditions are ripe for a major earthquake to strike Port-au-Prince". Residents of the Haitian capital must be prepared for such event that will end up occurring sooner or later. Patrick Charles, 65, a geologist and former professor at the Institute of Applied Geology of Havana, denies being alarmist. Yet, he didn't beat around the bush when *Le Matin* offered him the opportunity to respond on the record of seismic threat hovering over Port-au-Prince. The old researcher answered our questions with the rigor of an experienced and accomplished scholar. In his view, the danger is imminent, "Thank God science gives us tools that can predict these kinds of events, while allowing us to demonstrate our conclusions," he says. Now, our capital is at the mercy of Mother Nature; the clock is ticking. A major disaster is hanging over our head, "he predicted.

What intrigues us is not Professor Charles' rigor about this matter, but his unshakable belief in his prediction. To convince us, he does not hesitate to teach us a detailed course of geology, using very precise geological maps and his personal computer (PC). "Port-au-Prince is built on a large fault that runs from Pétion-Ville, crosses the entire southern peninsula, culminating in Tiburon. In 1751 and 1771, this city was completely destroyed by an earthquake. I bet it will happen again. Science can easily confirm it, "he added

On the basis of knowledge and scientific data accumulated on the subject for several decades, Patrick Charles, as a good citizen, is in a good position to be concerned. The imminence of the danger becomes clearer with time and events. And to make his prediction, Mr. Charles refers to earthquakes recorded in recent time at the Haitian capital. "In recent weeks, the earth shook several times in the metropolitan area of Port-au-Prince. From September 1 to 12, three minor tremors were recorded in Petion-Ville, Delmas, Croix- des-Bouquets, and Plaine du Cul-de-Sac. The Director of the Bureau of Mines and Energy (BME), engineer Dieuseul Anglade, confirmed this information warned that these minor tremors are worrying; they usually announce earthquakes of higher intensity.

Thank God, Charles Patrick is not only scholar interested in this subject. The issue of seismic threat in Port-au-Prince is a hot topic. It has been debated in recent days by many people, including senior intellectuals. The conclusions are unanimous: "Port-au-Prince may well be transformed overnight into a mass of ruins after a violent quake." "For two centuries, no major earthquake has been recorded in the Haitian capital. The amount of energy accumulated in the fault, puts us at risk of an earthquake of 7.2 magnitude on the Richter scale. Better not talk about it, no need to panic. But it would be a catastrophe of biblical proportion, "warned the head of the Bureau of Mines and Energy, speaking recently to the press.

The problem is posed in all its acuteness. The warnings are regularly sent. But timely and appropriate measures have yet to be taken. In case of an earthquake in the metropolitan area, Mr. Charles evokes two catastrophic scenarios: a giant tsunami in Lake Azuei, flooding the plain of Cul-de-Sac, the disintegration of the Morne l'Hôpital. "In both cases, we can't win. These things are quite possible. The key is to take steps to mitigate their effects. I am ready to put on the costume of a pilgrim to help my countrymen out of their lethargy, "says the geologist".

For a threat of such a magnitude, very few preventive measures have been announced by the authorities. The ongoing expansion of shanty towns at Morne l' Hôpital and the Plaine du Cul-de-Sac, coupled with

unregulated exploitation sand mines located at Laboule continues inexorably. It's worth point out the efforts of the Bureau of Mines and Energy (BME) to install throughout the national territory readers of two major faults across the country; one at the northern and the other at the southern peninsula. All geographic departments of Haiti, except for Centre, are exposed to earthquakes and tsunamis. "The authorities are obliged to take specific measures to protect these areas, although some may be unpopular. The three major hurricanes that whacked and devastated Haiti recently challenge our conscience. We live a very difficult time and we must act swiftly. The countdown has begun. Nature asks us accountable. We must act to save what can still be," says Patrick Charles.

Par Phoenix Delacroix