

NCCU Connects With Haiti

Contributed by James Slade--Black College Wire
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Former student editor travels back in the midst of the crisis

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Two first-generation Haitian Americans with ties to N.C. Central University are struggling to come to grips with the scope of the tragedy.

Haiti is a poor country; more than 50 percent of its citizens live on less than one dollar a day.

Rony Camille is an NCCU alumnus who graduated in 2007. Camille first heard that an earthquake had struck Port-au-Prince on Jan. 12 while at work at his job as media program director for Tyngsborough, Mass. "It was horrible. My mom is one of 10 kids and I have very few immediate family members here in the U.S. and the rest live in Haiti," he said. Camille chose not to listen to warnings and flew to the Dominican Republic, then took the bus from the Dominican Republic into Haiti.

"I was scared. At one point I lost it. I thought we were going to die," he said, referring to when he crossed into Haiti. He said the roads were so bad that the bus was about to tip into a lake.

"People are sleeping on the streets in tents." Prices have been raised on food and other resources, according to Camille. Exchanging Dominican pesos for the Haitian gourde was "twice the amount as usual. Many buildings are gone," he said.

"My biggest fear is the aftermath. This country has gone through a lot. This is worse than 911, Katrina and the tsunami." "This is a country that doesn't have infrastructure. There is no food or water," he said.

On a more positive note, Camille said, "They are in high spirits ... and people are being civilized." Camille returned from Haiti yesterday with news that his cousin died in a collapsed office building, but that the rest of his family survived. He described the situation as "really bad."

Mass communication junior Natasha Gordon was also in the dark about her family's situation in Haiti. "We couldn't get in contact with any family until this past Friday," she said.

"We couldn't get in contact with any family until this past Friday," she said. "It was also about the orphans we are responsible for," she said, explaining that her parents operate two orphanages that care for 45 children.

"Thankfully there weren't any casualties."

Gordon said one orphanage had minor damages, but the other is "completely gone."

Gordon, who plans to fly to Haiti next month, said it's important that students help out. "My goal is to start fundraising as soon as possible." Gordon is working with Duke University's Haitian Student Association and with NCCU's student organizations to get support for Haiti. Friday.

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The Student Government Association has called an emergency council meeting for January 22 to bring presidents of all campus organizations together to come up with ideas on how to help Haiti. Gordon's biggest fear is the number of bodies and where they are going to be buried. "The clean water supply will be infected by the amount of bodies," she said.

Both Gordon and Camille are confident that Haiti will make it through this latest hardship.

"This country has gone through a lot -- hurricanes, wars, and now an earthquake," said Camille, who described Haiti as a country of survivors.

Gordon and Camille also are proud of the way Americans have responded to the Haitian disaster.

“This is one of the things I love about America. Most Americans do not let culture and races divide us,”
Gordon said.

“It’s amazing,” Camille said. “People spread the word really fast. People are being so kind and caring, but there is more that needs to be done. More! More! More! needs to be done.”

Recent United Nations projections estimate that the death toll may reach 200,000. Currently, more than one million Haitians are homeless.

Gordon’s non-profit, Harmony of the Divine Light, can be reached at (754) 205-0580 or (954) 559-2170, or by e-mail at hodlc@aol.com.

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Jamese Slade writes for the Campus Echo, the North Carolina Central University student newspaper, which originally published a version of this article.