

## **Center to Transform Haitian Building Industry, Produce More Resilient Buildings**

On January 12, 2010, a catastrophic 7.0 earthquake struck Haiti. In the months that followed, the United States building community worked to develop a construction toolkit to help Haiti rebuild. Two years later, a glimmer of an idea that began during that time is now on its way to becoming a reality: the establishment of the Haiti Center for Sustainable Reconstruction & Development.

A diverse group of members of the U.S. construction community, the Haitian diaspora and the U.S. and Haitian higher education community are working together on the project. The Center, which is to be located at the State University of Haiti, will serve as an educational and technical resource for the entire Haitian building and construction industry, including public and private universities, technical and vocational schools, national and local government agencies, the building industry and the general public.

Following the earthquake, it became clear that poor building practices in Haiti played a significant role in the level of destruction and the loss of life. There was a need for proper education and training; codes, standards and guidance; enforcement; and tangible examples of proper construction techniques. The U.S. building community began compiling a toolkit of such materials to offer the Haitian government. After visits to Haiti, discussions with a number of organizations and some serious teamwork, a plan for the Center began to grow.

“Because of poor construction practices, more than 250,000 Haitians died unnecessarily in the earthquake,” said Ryan Colker, the National Institute of Building Sciences Presidential Advisor and Director of its Consultative Council. “Unfortunately, other hazards, including hurricanes and landslides, also pose significant threats. We saw an opportunity to change the culture of building in Haiti—an opportunity where a safe, sustainable and resilient built environment would support the emergence of a revitalized country. The Haiti Center for Sustainable Reconstruction & Development will provide Haiti with the know-how to establish the necessary governmental infrastructure and proper training for the building trades so that this level of destruction won’t occur in the future.”

“By engaging the Haitians in learning and implementing safe building techniques, the Center hopes to significantly reduce the damages and costs from the natural disasters that habitually visit the poor island,” said Daniel Lamaute, Reconstruction Project Liaison, National Association for the Advancement of Haitians (NOAH).

The Center will serve as a unique resource for the Caribbean region. It will encourage a multi-disciplinary research program focused on disaster risk reduction that covers engineering, architecture, physical planning, public policy and public administration. The Center will offer a diverse curriculum of courses for a variety of audiences, including professional courses for university students, continuing education for practicing professionals, resources for hands-on technical and vocational training, and outreach programs for the nation's building industry, government and non-government agencies. Plus, an onsite library will host training materials on construction practices.

A number of entities are involved in establishing the Haiti Center for Sustainable Reconstruction & Development, including the National Institute of Building Sciences, Earthquake Engineering Research Institute, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Ayers Saint Gross Architects + Planners, National Organization for the Advancement of Haitians, Institute for Building Technology and Safety, Haitian American Engineers Organization, Witt Associates, California Polytechnic University College of Architecture and Environmental Design, and the State University of Haiti.

Legally incorporated as a nonprofit organization in the United States in April of 2011, the Center is seeking funding, curriculum development and technical resources.

To donate funds or otherwise support this effort to improve the safety and durability of buildings in Haiti visit [www.HaitiBuildingCenter.org](http://www.HaitiBuildingCenter.org) or [www.InstitutHaitienduBatiment.ht](http://www.InstitutHaitienduBatiment.ht), or contact Ryan Colker (link to [rcolker@nibs.org](mailto:rcolker@nibs.org) subject line: I'm interested in helping with the Haiti Center.)