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Haiti and the Future of the Planet

The impact of the earthquake this month in Haiti is devastating. The impact on human life is overwhelming. Picking up the pieces and moving on will take weeks, months, years, decades.

Although I have never visited Haiti, I do feel a bond with the country. For those who have seen the movie or read the book *An Inconvenient Truth*, you may recall a slide that shows the border between Haiti and the Dominican Republic. On the Dominican side, full of trees, on the Haiti side, nothing.

I presented the Inconvenient Truth slide show sixty-five times in 2007 and 2008. I used the Haiti and Dominican Republic slide every single time. Why? Because it is a symbol of what can go wrong if natural resources are not managed well. This is not a reflection on Haitian people, but a reflection on the system. The system within Haiti and the global community to allow such a failure.

Governments and people from around the world are now sending money and resources to help. The sad part is that we have a very short attention span, as victims of the tsunami or Katrina may attest. Hundreds of millions of dollars have been raised to help so far, but will it ever be enough? This humanitarian action is the right thing to do. But what about when another news story consumes the air waves? Then what for the people of Haiti?

The ability to provide basic human needs in Haiti has not been a successful endeavour. Have a look at the border between Haiti and Dominican Republic on Google Earth and see for yourself. The 'system' has not provided the education and resources to be self sufficient, nor to use natural resources wisely. And, as is evident right now, the 'system' has not developed the know-how to construct buildings that can withstand an event like this earthquake. Let's hope that changes after this tragic catastrophe.

So what has this got to do with the future of the planet?

The unsustainable extraction of natural resources (like cutting down too many trees) in Haiti is a micro version of what we are doing with the planet. We are not respecting the planet's ability to reproduce natural resources at a rate that can keep up (think Newfoundland cod fishery, for example).

You may be thinking to yourself – but we are smarter than that. Or you may be thinking – but we, as humanity, are too big to fail. We thought that of the global financial system two years ago, and look what happened. Corporate greed and a lack of respect for 'the average citizen' got in the way of doing the right thing for everyone. If we are not careful with how we treat this earth, it will look like the tree-less 'forest' of Haiti in contrast to Dominican Republic.

The difference between the tsunami and Katrina and this earthquake, versus our future is that those terrible events happened in a blink of an eye, and immediate and extensive media coverage brought the world together to help the victims. Taking the rich natural resources we have now to a tipping point of no turning back will take a few decades, but the sad part is that it will not make the six o'clock news every night. And in these times, it seems that is what is needed today to continue us to keep paying attention to a problem.

That said, please visit the Canadian Red Cross (www.redcross.ca) today to make a donation towards the immediate need of saving lives and hope in Haiti. And as you do, perhaps you might consider making a decision in your life to do something different and better for the planet. And know that this, as part of a larger collective, will contribute to a better future for all citizens of earth, not just Haiti.

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