

Interview with the New US Ambassador to Haiti Pamela White – Friday 7-27-12

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Q- I am Ronald Cesar with the Voice of America's Creole Service. And we are speaking to the new US Ambassador to Haiti, the Honorable Pamela White. Ambassador White, it is a pleasure to have you with us on the Voice of America.

A- It is a great pleasure to be with you.

Q- First, we would like to congratulate you on your confirmation as Chief of the US Mission in Haiti.

A- Thank you so much. I am thrilled to be there. I am thrilled to be in that position.

Q- As you said during your swearing-in ceremony at the State Department on July 18, 2012, you left Haiti 22 years ago, but Haiti has always been on your heart. How satisfied are you about the ongoing rebuilding effort in Haiti after the devastating earthquake of January 2010?

A- As I told the Senators at my Senate hearing, I am thrilled with the progress. I don't think anyone has any conception of how hard the Haitian people have worked to reach the level that they are today. 250 thousand to 300 thousand people dead in a single day, you know, two hours; twice that many, three times that many were injured. Ten million square feet of rubble, to me it's just a miracle that all of the aftereffects of the earthquake have been handled, and they're already in the process of moving forward. I truly think it's just a miracle. And I don't think people

understand well enough just the magnitude of what went on that day in January in 2010.

Q- Right, obviously, the United States has been very generous to Haiti, especially after the earthquake. When you start your tour of duty in Haiti this coming August, what should people expect about the US assistance to this nation? Should they expect the same level of assistance? Or an increase in US foreign aid to Haiti?

A- Oh, that's a tough question. (laughter) You never know because you don't know what the state of the economy is going to be in the United States, and you know, aids is very dependent on the state of the economy, but I can tell you that the support for Haiti on the Hill, within the State Department, within the leadership of AID, is very strong. Every where I go people are so supportive of the effort in Haiti, and they understand that we have a special relationship with Haiti that we've had for many many years, you know, decades and decades; and that is not going to stop. That I can assure you.

Q- I am sure the Haitian people will be pleased to hear that. As US Ambassador to Haiti, we know that you will have a lot on your plate. Would you share with VOA listeners what some of your highest priorities will be? Or what would you want to accomplish in Haiti during the next 3 years?

A- Yes. Well, having lived in Haiti for five years from 1985 to 1990, a very chaotic period in Haitian history, I think that we have a great chance with the government leaders that are there today -- President Martelly and Prime Minister Lamothe -- to really move forward. And they have expressed the desire to do that. So, my absolute first priority is working with them to support them. The United States is

not going to transform Haiti. Haitians are going to transform Haiti. So I am very anxious to be supportive of them, to help with the legislative, to help with the elections, to help just with the governance issues; and then we'll get to the more basic issues of social development, economic development. I am strongly a believer that without a good economy, without giving the people jobs, we cannot have transformational change in Haiti. So I am going to make that a huge issue, bring more factories down, bring more hotels down, bring more tourists down; I am going to travel every where, I am going to get the Diaspora involved; I am going to get every community involved; I am going to travel as much as I can; I told my staff that I will sleep in tents. I want to talk to the common people; I want to hear what they are feeling. I want to make sure that every person in Haiti has a chance, through one medium or another, to talk to me. So I can't wait to get there to start listening and talking. And although my Creole is not anywhere near what Ambassador Merten's was, I will have some body with me at all times so that I can speak directly in Creole with people, and they can speak to me.

Q- Ambassador White, as you are getting ready to begin your duty in Haiti, is there a message that you would like to share with the Haitian people? And you just mentioned Creole, if you would like to send that message in Haitian Creole, please feel free to do so?

A- Yeah. I think one thing I'd like to say in Creole is to me, Haiti is not a poor country. I don't like this phrase that Haiti is the poorest country. I believe that Haiti is the richest country in terms of history, culture, and art. And I believe that Haiti is rich in terms of its people. The Haitian people are very hard workers, and I like that very much.

Q- That was the new US Ambassador to Haiti, the honorable Pamela White who is about to start her new job in Haiti as the Chief of the US

Mission in the month of August. Ambassador White, the Voice of America's Creole Service thanks you very much for taking the time to do this interview.

A- I am thrilled to do it. I can't wait to get to Haiti.