



Montreal, March 15, 2024

Dear friends and members of L'Arche,

Many of you have heard the news reports about the extremely fragile security situation in Haiti, home to two L'Arche Communities, Carrefour and Chantal. Carrefour is situated on the edge of the capital, Port-au-Prince, which is much more directly affected by the gang warfare than Chantal, located further South. Alain Ouedraogo, the Federation representative, as well as others, are in regular contact with Eunice the community leader in Carrefour.

Background context

The present political unrest worsened following the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse in July 2021. That shocking event had a heavy impact on national governance, the police and judicial system, which spiralled in a widespread breakdown in law and order. Into the power vacuum have stepped various armed gangs. All commentators agree that Haiti now finds itself in an unprecedented situation, with increased violence, inflation and poverty: massacres, fires, looting and kidnapping have become regular occurrences. Many schools and colleges have closed their doors.

L'Arche Carrefour

In an interview with the Communication Team earlier this week, Eunice described the daily pressure they are living.

"The current situation in Haiti is really taking its toll on us. We had thought after a few years that things would get better, but they've only been getting worse. Now none of us feels safe and hopeful. When gangs fight each other, we hear the gunshots as though they were inside the L'Arche compound. This really brings our stress level up, and many of us now are getting sick, with tension and high pressure."



The location of the community means that they cannot really move freely outside their compound. In Eunice's words, L'Arche is "sandwiched between two neighborhoods controlled by rival gangs". These gangs have set up roadblocks on both the road to the North and to the South: "This is dangerous; this is expensive as well. So we are really limited in our movements and this affects everyone. Our school staff, assistants, core members. Everyone is scared, and when gunfire erupts a few times a week, it feels as though they are right next door."

This impossibility of safe travel is also having an important financial impact. Firstly the community hasn't managed to get into town to sell their workshop products, such as their famous peanut butter, but also the social turmoil has meant a dramatic increase in prices of goods, food and medicine.

For the past 3 weeks, the risks of road travel have prevented any of the external core members from attending L'Eveil, the L'Arche centre for psycho-social support and training. Priests too have also been unable to offer much-needed regular spiritual support. In addition, the community is now offering a temporary refuge for employees who have fled from their own homes due to the armed gangs in their area.



L'ARCHE

Tragically, the lack of essential medicines has led to the death of Samuel Torchon, a much-loved core member in L'Eveil. In spite of all their efforts, Samuel's parents were unable to replace the drugs that controlled his epilepsy. For the moment, under these very difficult conditions, L'Arche Carrefour is continuing to function as best it can.

The same interview included Emmanuella, a Carrefour core member: some of you will remember that she was one of the community's delegates at the International Federation Assembly last year. Emmanuella described how she is coping with the fear caused by the sound of gunfire:

"I am lucky because I am not as scared as others, so I try to stay strong and remove some stress from my friends' minds. We watch TV, we do some work in the garden close to the house, we tell each other jokes and we try to laugh as much as we can. I also really like to dance and sing to bring everyone up, and because I have more capacities than some other of my friends [with disabilities], I try to keep everyone moving, doing some work in the kitchen, or just walking around inside our compound. Even though the situation is very difficult, I feel I am growing in this moment and being more independent, helping others."



Eunice too wants to end our interview on a positive note:

"My message to our L'Arche Federation is one of hope. Though the situation is very difficult for us now, every day we wake up and know we must still take care of each other, support our core members and our assistants. This is what keeps us going, and the small moments of joy, laughter and peace we find with each other are enough to carry us through. Please, keep us in your prayers, and always be there for each other. In the hardest of situations, people with disabilities are too often the last ones to be remembered. But L'Arche is proving that we should really do the opposite. I came to L'Arche 20 years ago, and since the very first day, it is the core members who have kept me coming back. I feel privileged to give my strength to the community, and feel carried by the trust I receive."

On behalf of the whole Federation, I would like to thank Eunice, Emmanuella, and all the members of L'Arche in Haiti, for all the efforts they are making, day by day, to ensure the safety of everyone in the community, in such hard and anxious times. We will continue to monitor the situation, giving them all the practical and moral support that we can. At a time like this, the Federation is most like a family, holding our most vulnerable members in our thoughts and prayers.

If you and your community would like to support L'Arche in Haiti and other communities in crisis, we invite you to give through your country structure to the Emergency Fund of L'Arche International. These funds will help us respond quickly in Haiti, and in other places that face crisis and emergency. The community will also be glad to receive messages of support via social media.



Sylvain Brabant
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