



ITINERANT UNIVERSITY OF RESISTANCE IN HAITI

JULY - DECEMBER 2020 UPDATE

REPORT TO FUNDERS

Dear friends and allies, we are pleased to share with you the report of the past six months, in the first year of operation of the Itinerant University of Resistance. We wrap up 2020 marveling at how the university has been able to advance, despite months of suspension due to political upheaval and repression, tremendous violence and insecurity, and COVID and quarantine. Our team – a fabulous coordinator, full-time Spanish teacher, and the engaged coordinating committee of movement actors from around the Americas – plus the enthusiastic students and our colleagues in peasant and activist organizations, have somehow made the impossible possible. We close the year smoothly, progressing in our mission and program. We view this as affirmation that what we bring responds to a clear need and priority, and that our relationships and approach are solid.

When you, dear funders, read that first paragraph, we hope you see yourself in it. None of the progress described below would have been possible without your support, faith in us, and commitment to a more just and environmentally safe world – a world where farmland, livelihood, community, safe water, and Mother Earth are not destroyed for mining and other sources of multinational profit. We are grateful to you!

ADVANCES IN THE SECOND HALF OF 2020

✓ Our gender focus has been formalized into its own program: **Women Matter, Too**. We have held an interest in a women's program since the university's founding, but did not have the capacity to launch it amidst the challenges of our first year. However, inspired by 17 women having come to



inform us – to our delight, not asked, *informed* - that they wanted their own class, and with the university running smoothly as we move into our second year, we have formalized Women Matter, Too. Our objectives are to bring forth the power and voices of women, both in our program and in the broader Haitian land rights and anti-extraction movement. Yes!

- Just over one-third of our Spanish students are women. Though we wish that at least 50% were, that is very difficult to achieve in Haiti, where women carry an exorbitant workload in the home and family, and fathers often prohibit their wives and daughters from participating in public activities. But we are developing strategies to confront these hurdles;

- Because COVID prevents live exchanges, we are organizing virtual exchanges, via videos, between women in our Spanish classes and women's territory and water defense movements in the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, and likely Mexico. The videos will give the women students a chance to practice Spanish while learning from their counterparts;

- We are commencing women's caucuses in our mixed classes, both to create more space for women's voices and to open gender discussions, all in Spanish; and

- We are creating radio spots, for distribution through popular radio networks, using essays that young female students wrote, on such topics as violence, migration, and the need to organize as women. We are also using these essays as class material.

✓ Our classes have grown fast, in response to demand.

- We are now teaching Spanish to approximately 100 students, most of them young adults, in seven classes across three towns;

- The demand has been such that we have hired a full-time teacher: Marcela Colocho, a Creole-speaking Salvadoran who has worked with the movement against mining in El Salvador, and who previously spent a year in Haiti teaching Spanish to a peasant youth group using Freirean pedagogy. Marcela is based in the mine-pocked North, outside of Cap-Haitian.



Our full-time teacher, Marcela Colocho, at work.

✓ We are translating and making available to the Haitian anti-extraction and territory defense movement materials created in Latin America. We are:

- Using these materials as the basis of our Spanish classes; and
- Producing audio broadcasts with these tools, to be distributed to mining-threatened communities via radio. We are working both with the SAKS, the national network of 43 community radio stations, and with Radio Resistance.

✓ Now that Haiti is out of quarantine, we are broadening and expanding our collaborations with other Haitian coalitions fighting for land rights and against extraction. Our partners are:

- The Committee for Mining Justice, Haiti's principal coalition fighting extraction, which comprises dozens of grassroots groups, impacted communities, and non-profit organizations;
- The Charlemagne Peralte Political School, again open after months of pandemic closure, led by the four largest and most effective peasant organizations; and
- Action for Reforestation and Defense of the Environment, and two of its allied communities in the North which are fighting proposed mines.

✓ As a side project accomplished by volunteers, our Spanish materials are now being adapted to help Haitians trapped and abused on the Mexican border learn Spanish. The lack of Spanish of those heading north in a bid to reach the US makes Haitians - already obviously not Mexicans, due to their black skin - very vulnerable to abuse by the police and to capture by traffickers. The Fray Matias Human Rights Center in Tapachula, the Mexican town that is the main entry point for migrants, is using the materials with their large client population of Haitians.

LOOKING FORWARD TO 2021

In 2021, we will strengthen and expand the above elements. We also eagerly await the end of the pandemic so that we can advance other in-person parts of our program, which involve:

- ✓ Organizing trainings and exchanges by Latin American anti-mining and land rights leaders, to help Haitians build their strength in resisting extraction and protecting their territories; and
- ✓ Helping Haitian anti-extraction and land-rights movements – with their newly gained Spanish – integrate into relevant networks in the Americas, becoming members, attending cross-border gatherings, gaining information and tools, participating in global actions and campaigns, and gaining more solidarity for their own struggles.

OUR FUNDER ALLIES in 2020:

**American Jewish World Service
Anderson-Rogers Foundation
Bina's Kids Foundation**

**CarEth Foundation
Lawson Valentine Foundation
Lippincott Foundation**

As we close 2020, we THANK YOU for your trust in us and this project. The University of Resistance would not exist without you.