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## January Roundtable: The Haiti Earthquake, One Year Later, Introduction

### Abstract

An annotation of:

"Haiti's Blame Game" by Pooja Bhatia. Foreign Policy. November 23 2010.

### Keywords

Human rights, Haiti, Natural disasters, Displaced peoples, Health care, Government

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## The Haiti Earthquake, One year Later

Article under review: "[Haiti's Blame Game](#)" by Pooja Bhatia. *Foreign Policy*. November 23 2010.

This week marks the one year anniversary of the earthquake that shook the Haitian capital, Port-au-Prince. This natural disaster threw an already impoverished nation into deeper social, economic, and even political distress. More than 230,000 people were killed, estimates are that a million remain homeless, and countless numbers of children were made orphans. The country was devastated, but the international community—more than ever before—was eager to respond with many pledges of assistance.

A year after the earthquake, neither the international community nor the Haitian state is making significant progress on critical reconstruction projects. A recently released report from [Oxfam](#) criticizes the slow pace of the recovery. "As Haitians prepare for the first anniversary of the earthquake, close to one million people are reportedly still displaced," the report says. "Less than 5 percent of the rubble has been cleared, only 15 percent of the temporary housing that is needed has been built and relatively few permanent water and sanitation facilities have been constructed." The report is particularly critical of international donors and, specifically, the Interim Haiti Recovery Commission (IHRC), co-chaired by former President Bill Clinton and Haitian Prime Minister Jean-Max Bellerive. Oxfam officials, citing United Nations figures, note that less than half of the reconstruction aid promised by international donors has been disbursed.

The past year has not been merely one of slow recovery and unfulfilled promises in terms of financial aid for this Caribbean country. After the earthquake, the Haitian people had to face one crisis after another. A [cholera epidemic](#) broke out in the fall, taking nearly 3,000 lives, and the epidemic is likely to spread even further. Since November, Haiti has faced deep political turmoil due to the lack of clarity on the results of the presidential election and national and international denunciations of [irregularities in the electoral procedures](#). This election was the first round of what was supposed to proceed to a runoff election, which has now been postponed until February.

Given the pessimistic account of Haiti's recovery efforts, this month's Roundtable centerpiece by Pooja Bhatia indicates that "Haitians' biggest political problem is figuring out who is responsible for their continued misery." Bhatia poses the question, "Indeed, who is to blame in a country dominated by peacekeepers and NGOs, helmed by a government too weak—or unwilling—to deal with them?" Without necessarily attempting to answer this very precise question, our panelists touch on a series of critical issues for the reconstruction efforts and future political challenges for the next Haitian government. The effectiveness of international aid, the recent electoral process, the importance of local ownership in rebuilding processes, and a comparison with other reconstructions efforts are among the topics discussed in this month's Roundtable.