

**HAITIAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION**  
**Willingness, Know-How, Resources**

Weston, Florida, Port-au-Prince and Aquin, Haiti  
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**"FROM THE MOUNTAINS TO THE SEA"**  
**From Charity to Development**



**The Triangle of Toto: A diaspora at AMHE**

When the Executive Central Committee of the Haitian Medical Association Abroad (AMHE) invited me to speak on the theme, “*An Outsider’s Perspective on What Could Strengthen AMHE and Make It a More Effective Association,*” a question immediately crossed my mind: why seek an outsider’s opinion when I have been a member of AMHE for nearly 25 years? This invitation was both an honor and a puzzle. Wasn’t my journey since leaving Haiti and my development as part of the diaspora the main reason for reaching out to me?

I came to realize that my atypical journey, my many cultural stopovers, and my limited interactions with the Haitian community had shaped a unique perspective. Perhaps the Committee wanted to explore this vision, enriched by experiences across the continent.

My story begins in Haiti, rooted in an upbringing filled with *Kompa music*, lively companionship with my friends Ti Jacques and Ti Michel, the irresistible flavors of *griot*, *pikliz* and *fried plantains*, all seasoned with a unique religious syncretism where vodou and Christianity coexist like two old friends. These experiences instilled in me a deep cultural pride and an insatiable curiosity for the world.

At 19, I left Haiti’s shores to explore new horizons. My first destination: Mexico City, where my new friends, El Pollo and El Chachis, introduce me to the warmth of mariachi music, the splendor of festive religious celebrations, and the spicy delights of *posole* and *mole*, dishes as rich and complex as Mexican culture itself.

Next, I landed in the Bronx, New York - a vibrant cultural melting pot. There, alongside Jimmy, Fred, and Stuart, I was immersed in jazz and gospel, two forms of expression as vibrant as the neighborhoods that birthed them. As for the cuisine? A global buffet where every bite tells a story.

From there, I found myself in Lafayette, Louisiana, in the heart of the Deep South. There, I met Boudreau, Thibodeau, and Arceneaux. They introduced me to *Cajun* and *Zydeco* music, as well as dishes like *gumbo* and *crawfish étouffée*, celebrating a unique heritage—a harmonious blend of French, Creole, and Acadian influences.

Finally, for the past 25 years, I have lived in South Florida, in Weston, a miniature United Nations where Venezuelans, Colombians, Russians, Ukrainians, Cubans, Haitians, Arabs, Jews, Japanese, and many others coexist, alongside a few native-born Americans.

At every step, I have been enriched by my experiences and distanced from the deep ties that other AMHE members maintain with their Alma Mater, the State University of Haiti.

Unlike many others, my journey has given me a different, complementary perspective. My “outsider’s view” is neither superior nor inferior but unique. And in that difference lies an opportunity to offer an intercultural vision and a fresh approach to broaden AMHE’s ambitions and strengthen its role.

Founded in 1972 at Harlem Hospital by 64 Haitian physicians, AMHE today is an association of approximately 150 members. It embodies a strong cultural identity and is a vital link between Haiti and its medical diaspora. Yet, let’s be honest: AMHE faces significant challenges. First, there is a generational imbalance, with most members approaching retirement or already retired. Second, there is low membership renewal, as many young Haitian physicians prefer to join modern, better-structured organizations that offer attractive opportunities and financial models.

During my time in Louisiana, I joined the National Medical Association (NMA), a model of unity and growth. Founded in 1895 by eight African American physicians, the NMA now has over 30,000 members across 112 affiliated societies. It has successfully addressed significant challenges through collaborations with institutions such as the American Medical Association (AMA) and the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) to increase African American representation in medicine.

I had the privilege of accompanying NMA members on a lobbying session with federal senator Orrin Hatch, then Chair of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions. That experience was a masterclass in advocacy. When an association speaks with one voice, it can influence public policy to improve access to healthcare and defend marginalized communities.

After our meeting, AMHE hosted a fundraising event at the Ritz Carlton, one of the most prestigious hotels in Fort Lauderdale, complete with breathtaking ocean views. The event was dazzling. The crème de la crème of the Haitian diaspora, elegantly dressed, was present. Everything was perfectly orchestrated, from the clinking of wine glasses to the soft hum of refined conversations.

Yet, a remark from an American attendee struck a nerve: *“Why do Haitians give money destined for Haiti’s poor to America’s rich?”* Caught off guard, I couldn’t help but reply with a mischievous smile: *“Because the U.S. gives the money of poor Americans to Haiti’s rich. It’s reciprocity!”*

Behind this humor-tinged remark lies a reality that warrants deeper reflection. In Haiti, as within its diaspora, the assertion of identity stands as a central pillar, shaping various behaviors where appearances play a significant role. Making visible contributions often becomes a way to affirm one’s identity, to prove one’s existence and success. This fulfills a profound need for light, as if to momentarily dispel the shadows that have marked our collective history. And so, between bouts of laughter and a refined cocktail, I found myself thinking: *“Ah, Haiti! Even in our most noble gestures, there is always that little inexplicable something that brings us back to our ongoing quest for recognition.”*

To confront the symbolic darkness of our country, a mental representation has emerged. Light has become the ultimate symbol of social success. Whether it’s at the Ritz Carlton in Fort Lauderdale, where diaspora soirées shine with brilliance, or during lavish funerals in Aquin, where modest families go into debt to offer their departed princely farewells, these displays reflect a quest for social elevation. This pursuit perpetuates a collective illusion, despite the sincere efforts of many to escape it, which often prove futile. It is, in a way, both

poetic and tragic, a means of adding a touch of brightness to a reality that is often dark. After all, if the light shines brightly enough, who stops to notice the shadow lingering behind?

Toto, a wise man from Aquin, explained this paradox in near-mathematical terms: “Haiti should be an isosceles triangle where Power (P), Wealth (W), and Knowledge (K) are balanced. But often, the Knowledge side is missing.” To move forward, he insists, we must restore this balance by investing in knowledge, through a secular, free and compulsory education.

AMHE may take inspiration from this wisdom by adopting a strategic vision. Why not explore a collaboration with the NMA, becoming a clearly Haitian sub-section within this established institution? Such an initiative would expand AMHE’s network, provide access to resources, and amplify its impact, all while preserving its unique essence.

Ultimately, the AMHE holds immense potential. With strategic reflection and renewed commitment, it can become an essential player in advancing Haitian medicine. And who knows? By balancing its own "*Toto's triangle*," the AMHE might inspire Haiti to do the same. After all, in this world, light shines brighter when it illuminates the path to knowledge.

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