

# Opinion

## Americans give chilly response to Chilean quake

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It's all about the Benjamins. But Chile will not be receiving many of those American 'dollah dollah billz'; even after surviving an 8.0 magnitude earthquake, while Haiti had a 7.0 magnitude quake. Apparently

size does not matter to Americans, proving my copy of Cosmo wrong once again.

While having lunch with a friend, we discussed the earthquake in Chile in contrast to the earthquake in Haiti. Since we both do not claim a strong background in geology, or geography for that matter; but do boast a resume in Communications and Political Science, the discussion turned to the American public's response, and the political response to both disasters.

Though it is early, it seems that the reaction to the earthquake in Chile is far less than that of the response to Haiti. As of this article, there are about 200 dead in Chile, compared to the over 20,000 dead in Haiti. Could the death toll be a factor? Or could it be that South America is too far away to care about?

I have a feeling that American's are just out of pity. The Hope for Haiti telethon raised \$58 million, that's right, \$58 million. For that much money, the nation of Haiti could just buy another island and move there and not worry about the mess. Maybe it was that the quake happened right after the holidays when everyone was still in good spirits, or maybe there was nothing else on television to watch.

Since the quake hit, Americans have been texting 90999 to HAITI, donating \$10 to help. I did see a commercial for a text to help Chile, but Michelle Obama certainly wasn't telling me to pick up my phone. As I write, the commercial I am referencing is on; not urging you to send money to Chile, but to Haiti.

This brings me to my next point, the politics. My friend pointed out that it seems the White House reacted faster to Haiti than it did to Hurricane Katrina. Although I do not have the tick-tock for those days, it does seem like it. President Obama pledged \$100 million, plus troops to Haiti only a few days after the quake. At this time, no money or troops are pledged to go to Chile.

Although I understand that Chile is a far more developed country than Haiti, what makes it in less need of help? Is this going to become a team Edward or team Jacob thing, where the public is either donating to Haiti or Chile? Or will they simply leave Chile to their own efforts?

I hate to sound like Rush Limbaugh, but what is Haiti's main export? Besides being a popular cruise destination, it is apparel and coffee; and 70 percent of their exports go to the United States. Chile, on the other hand, has main exports of copper and fruit, with the United States only receiving 11 percent of that. It seems to me that the government has more to gain from Haiti than from Chile.

It may be too soon to tell, but it is my prediction that you will not see \$58 million being raised for Chile, nor will you see people rushing to the airport to provide help. Too bad Chile. You should have rescheduled your devastating national disaster when the Olympics weren't on.



A young Chilean boy looks on from the rubble after his neighborhood was destroyed by an 8.0 earthquake early Saturday morning

## Ivory Coast a test for African politics

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He got his first one-year extension in 2005. And another in 2006. And every year since, President Laurent Gbagbo has gone through the motions of organizing presidential elections,

only to cancel them at the last minute.

His critics say he has taken the country hostage, putting democracy on pause by refusing to hold elections many say he ill likely lose.

The latest cancellation was two weeks ago, when Gbagbo dissolved the government just weeks ahead of the ballot, claiming the voter roll had been tampered with and postponing the poll by two months.

It prompted riots that left at least five dead in a country that was once a model of political stability and economic prosperity, dubbed the "African miracle" for its roaring growth rate. Ivory Coast is still the world's top cocoa producer but its people have become increasingly poorer and impatient mobs have taken to the streets.

Although Gbagbo is known to have significant support in the country's south, experts and ordinary citizens say he doesn't have the numbers to win an election.

"All he is doing is trying to buy himself time," said political analyst and newspaper owner Abdoulaye Sangare. "It's so that he can fix his main problem, which is figuring out how to get elected."

Late last year, the country's election commission produced a voter roll consisting of some 5 million voters whose citizenship had been confirmed and a gray list of 1 million who need to provide proof of their nationality to make the list.

Sangare said that soon after the list was delivered, the government audited it and concluded that the voters were overwhelmingly from ethnicities and regions of the country that favor the opposition. On Feb. 12, Gbagbo announced on state television he was unilaterally dissolving the government and its election commission, making it impossible for elections to go ahead as planned.

Gbagbo's continued postponement of the election comes at a time when the population is feeling the economic pinch of higher food prices and growing unemployment.

In Abidjan's gritty Abobo suburb, where police beat back anti-Gbagbo protesters this week, teacher Yeo Klitoloma said students can no longer afford to buy books. Many don't eat properly and fall asleep in class, he said.

"Each time we think we're at the end, each time we think it's over, we suddenly go backward," said Klitoloma, who said he set fire to tires during the protest. "Gbagbo needs to go. He is just drawing out our misery."

Gbagbo came to power after a 1999 military coup led by Gen. Robert Guei. Guei organized elections the next year, but disqualified his top opponents — including toppled President Henri Konan Bedie, who was ticked off the list for not properly filling in his health certificate, and former Prime Minister Alassane Ouattara, who was accused of not being a full-blooded Ivoirian because his parents were born near the country's borders.

Guei faced off against Gbagbo — and lost. When the general tried to claim victory, hundreds of thousands of people poured into the streets to prevent him from staying in power. Two years into Gbagbo's term, an armed uprising plunged the country into civil war.

When Gbagbo's first term expired in 2005, he argued elections could not proceed because rebels had not been disarmed. The United Nations gave Gbagbo one year to hold elections. As the deadline approached, the opposition said they would reject his request for another extension, but he forced it through.

In 2007, he signed a peace deal with the rebels, creating a unity government and a roadmap for elections. It called for the creation of an electoral commission that would include appointees from all political sides and whose task was to prepare the voter roll.

The commission redefined citizenship as a person that has at least one Ivoirian parent, changing the electoral law which had earlier required both parents to be citizens. The new definition eliminates previous challenges to Ouattara's candidacy. He was banned from running in both 1995 and 2000 on the argument that one of his parents is from Burkina Faso.

Both he and Bedie, the former president who was disqualified in 2000, are now back in Abidjan, where they lead two top opposition parties which are expected to carve out a significant chunk of the electorate.

"So long as he will be able to avoid elections, he will not hold elections," said the 68-year-old Ouattara. "This is clear in my mind. He knows he cannot win ... Therefore — like many dictators — he prefers to take a chance and remain."