

HAITI

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Some 80% of Haiti's seven million population live in abject poverty. The country's GDP has experienced negative growth since international donors suspended almost all aid following the May 2000 legislative elections that were fraught with irregularities. Since then, under President Jean-Bertrand Aristide and Prime Minister Yvon Neptune, unemployment and underemployment continue to be widespread with more than two-thirds of the labour force without formal jobs.

Exports valued at US\$326.6 million fob in 2002 were mainly coffee, oils and cocoa, with 90% going to the US. Imports of US\$977.5 million cif comprised food, manufactured goods, machinery and transport equipment, fuels, raw materials, 60% from the US and 10% from the EU.

The country is a major Caribbean trans-shipment point for cocaine en route to the US and Europe, and there is substantial money-laundering activity (Colombian narcotics traffickers favour Haiti for illicit financial transactions). Overall, Haiti is regarded as Latin America's poorest country.

Most Haitians depend on small-scale subsistence farming and the country has a modest mineral industry based on the production of cement and feedstocks such as clays and limestone. Other mining activity includes the quarrying of some marble (100 m³/y), the production of marine salt, and the dredging for sand (250,000 m³/y) and gravel (750,000 m³/y).

There has been some mineral exploration activity in the north where Montreal-based KWG Resources assessed the Morne Bossa gold prospect. The resource at Grand Bois is estimated at 4.6 Mt at an average grade of 1.9 g/t Au contained within the surface oxidised zone. This is roughly circular and may be amenable to open-pit mining and heap leaching. However, it seems that the company is now concentrating on diamonds in northern Ontario and Brazil.

There are immense calcium carbonate deposits in the Caribbean and Jamaica dominates this trade, but Haiti as well as Cuba are believed to possess excellent material and are closer to the US, a major consumer. In the north of Haiti, there are small undeveloped deposits of chromite, copper, gold, iron, ore, lead, manganese, silver, sulphur, tin and zinc. Auriferous ores have long been noted and some alluvial gold deposits have been worked on a small scale. Base-metal ores occur in the Cretaceous acid volcanic belt stretching across the island, and Haiti's Massif du Nord contains porphyry copper orebodies of the Pueblo Viejo type famous in the Dominican Republic, which enjoys a comparatively active minerals sector.