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UN agency launches initiative to ship donated books to Haitian children



UNESCO has launched the "A Book for a Child in Haiti" project

26 July 2010 – The United Nations agency tasked with promoting education has launched an initiative to send donated books to camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Haiti, in an effort to restart the learning process for the country's children whose schools and libraries were destroyed by the earthquake in January.

The UN Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (**UNESCO**) launched the "A Book for a Child in Haiti" project this month, collecting French-language books from staff, friends, pupils and publishers for distribution to children in Haiti.

The first shipment of 800 books arrived in the Haitian capital, Port-au-Prince, earlier this month. The books – novels, fairy tales, comic strips and storybooks – offer Haitian children from the ages of three to 17 a welcome distraction from the harsh reality of their immediate surroundings and an opportunity to read despite the destruction of many libraries.

UNESCO has been urging parents and neighbourhood organizations to encourage children to read and write so that they do not lose what they had already learned. Younger children tend to forget much of their reading and writing skills from lack of practice, according to UNESCO.

Pupils and students in Paris, where UNESCO is based, will be asked to donate more books for the project when the French school year begins in September.

Planned book shipments to Haiti include contributions from a wider donor base. The operation will then be extended to providing educational content to child-friendly spaces in the IDP camps and to school libraries.

Through the book distribution project, UNESCO hopes to stimulate informal learning in the IDP camps and add a personal touch to an exchange between Haitian and French children, who are encouraged to write personal messages of solidarity on the title pages of donated books.

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