

# Capitol preparing for anticipated inauguration

By Zenitha Prince

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WASHINGTON (NNPA) — Washington, D.C., will be bursting at the seams come January.

With President-elect Barack Obama poised to become the first African-American president of the United States, and with continuing interest in the charismatic man and his family whose vision birthed a movement, people from around the world are clamoring for access to the never-to-be-seen-again inauguration on Jan. 20. For updates about the 2009 presidential inauguration events, visit the official site at <http://inaugural.senate.gov>. No tickets are available yet.

"All of us who voted have earned a right to see this take place; so make sure that you have your analog cable and all the media you

can find because one way or the other, in the front seat of the White House or the back seat of the airplane or bus, we will find a way to see and make history," wrote "Trisha" on a Nov. 8 blog about the swearing-in on [www.aolblackvoices.com](http://www.aolblackvoices.com).

Only a few days after Obama trounced erstwhile rival Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., to win the 2008 presidential contest, demand for tickets has already exceeded supply. Though free, inauguration tickets are limited in number—240,000—and distributed through members of Congress about a week before the event.

The day after the election, District Del. Eleanor Holmes Norton said she set up a special telephone line and e-mail address to take requests, but her office was inundated with so many calls that it stymied other urgent non-

inauguration related calls and she had to stop taking names.

Norton said she is worried this foreshadows even worse conditions to come.

"I share the excitement and enthusiasm of my constituents, but I am concerned that even the few who obtain tickets will not be able to get through the crowds at the Mall," Norton said in a statement. "The only people sure to get a view of the parade and the swearing-in are the people who watch it on television in the comfort of their homes."

Officials say with people determined to participate—whether they have tickets or not—they expect the crowds to surpass the 1.2 million that attended President Lyndon Johnson's swearing-in in 1965. Norton, a member of the Homeland Security Committee, said she plans to meet next week with

security officials to discuss the ramifications.

"An entirely new game plan will be needed to cope with an inauguration like none the country has ever seen," Norton said.

Already, officials have had to deal with fraudulent websites and others exploiting people's desperation by selling them "free" tickets.

"Any website or ticket broker claiming that they have inaugural tickets is simply not telling the truth," said Howard Gantman, staff director for the Joint Congressional Committee on Inaugural Ceremonies. "We urge the public to view any offers of tickets for sale with great skepticism... An entirely new game plan will be needed to cope with an inauguration like none the country has ever seen."

Most remain hopeful — even adamant —  
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## Haiti

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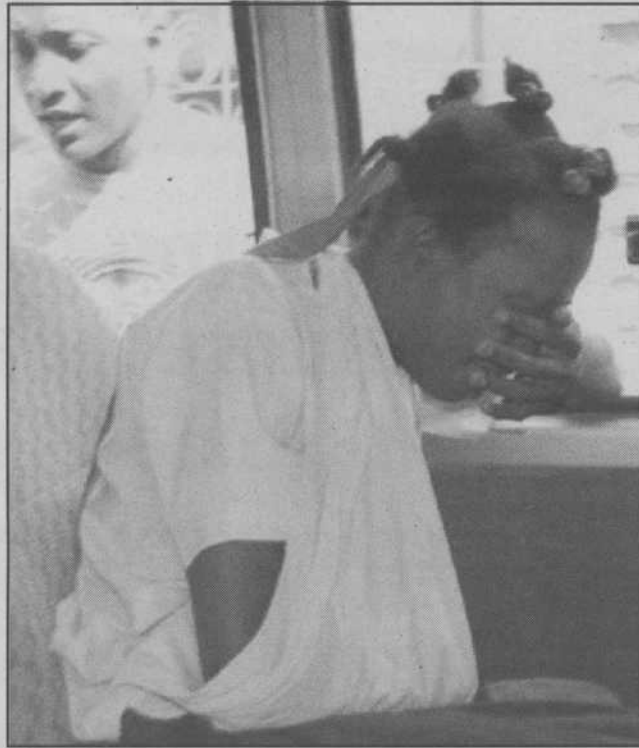
now have no school and no books. They are sick and have nightmares. Government officials and people from all the NGOs, they all come, take pictures, make speeches and they leave us with nothing. We need action!"

Reports of the deaths caused by the collapse of the school on Friday continue to climb, reaching nearly 100 on Sunday. Several hundred other children escaped or were rescued. Many are still missing.

"The families of the victims are mad," the father said. "But it is not just the families who are mad. All the people know the government is not making good decisions. We do not trust that the government will help us. No doctors have come. Nobody comes except those who want to take pictures, make reports, and make money. We have been promised everything, but we have received nothing. Watch," he said.

"After 15 days, no one is even going to be talking about this. Only the victims and the families will be talking about it. The government and some other people will get some money out of the disaster and the children and their families and the community will see none of it." Haiti has been plagued by a string of disasters this year with over 800 dead from four hurricanes that raked the island nation; many of those dead were also children. The three-story school which collapsed, College La Promesse, has for years served hundreds of children from pre-school through high school, ages 3 to 20. The school operated on a hillside in Petionville, a suburb of Port au Prince.

One 8-year-old girl, who attended the school for three



A student cries near the scene of a school that collapsed in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Crews are looking for victims.

years, reported that her class had just returned from recess when they saw the ceiling in their classroom falling down. She told this writer that she prayed to God to save her and started running but could not see because of all the dust and smoke in the air. "I tried to get out. I heard the building breaking down. I was crying and I ran away. A man teacher grabbed my hand and pulled me out of the school as the whole building was falling. After I got outside, the teacher went back in. I cried and cried because I could not find my brother and sister."

The little girl eventually found her family and her brother and sister were not seriously harmed.

"When I try to sleep," said the little girl, "I fear the house is going to fall on me and I see the school falling again."

She has bruises on her leg and stomach. Some friends are still missing. While Petionville is a prosperous suburb of Port au Prince, the

school was in a poor neighborhood of the city called Nerrette. Though some news reports have indicated the school tuition was \$1,500 a year, parents say that is absolutely wrong.

"It was an inexpensive community school run by a community church," one said. Reverend Fortin Augustin, founder and operator of the school, was being held and questioned by Haitian authorities over the weekend.

Family members of Augustin said he voluntarily turned himself in Saturday after receiving numerous threats against himself and his family.

Though the government is reportedly considering charging Augustin with involuntary manslaughter, relatives think he is being blamed for common construction problems in Haiti, Augustin had his own two daughters in school that day, said a nephew, who brought the injured children for medical

treatment. Family members taught there. And for years all his nieces and nephews attended the school. His nephew, who brought food to him on Sunday morning, said that his uncle did not even know that two of his little cousins died in the collapse.

"He cried when I told him that," he said. "The family understands why people are angry," the nephew reported, "but this was a family church and a family low-budget school. They were just trying to help the community."

One parent agreed. "I do not think it is the Reverend's fault," he said. "This is all about the government. They allow any type of construction anywhere. Many schools and other buildings in this country are built the same way. Why didn't the mayor stop the school construction if it was wrong? The mayor campaigned in this very school and in the church."

I accuse the government — the mayor, the ministers, even President Preval." Reverend Gerard Jean-Juste, a Haitian priest and longtime advocate for and with the poor, was deeply saddened by the disaster. "The poorest ones in Haiti cannot continue to live in hazardous conditions, in abject poverty condemned to suffer and die inhumanly. This neighborhood, where the school was, Nerrette, is one of the poor areas in the rich city of Petionville. With some sharing from the wealthy Haitians and good will from municipal authorities, the poor ones next door to the rich ones could have had better treatment and greater services. It is unbelievable that alongside the castles and beautiful and well-built schools for the rich residents of Petionville, there lie, with-

out zoning regulations, the shanty towns."

Haiti is the most impoverished country in the Western Hemisphere. Over half the population (over 4 million) lives on less than \$1 per day, and over three-quarters (over 6 million) live on less than \$2 a day. Meanwhile, Haiti is forced to send over \$1 million a week to repay off its foreign debt, over half of which was incurred when the country was ruled by dictators friendly with the U.S.

The 7,000 UN troops in Haiti cost over \$1 million each day. When asked if the parents considered going to court to seek justice from the government, the father scoffed.

"Justice in courts in Haiti exists only for the people in the government and the people with money. When you are poor, your justice is in the Bible and in Jesus alone." The parent asked that his name not be used for fear of reprisal. "Everyone knows this is the truth, but in Haiti you can be killed for telling the truth."

The father saw hope in the U.S. presidential election last week.

"Maybe now that Obama



A grade school in central Port-au-Prince partially collapsed Wednesday leaving seven people hurt, Haitian police said.