

The World as We Speak

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2010 Prix de la Francophonie

The French Heritage Language Program has been awarded the 2010 Prix Spécial de la Francophonie in recognition of its promotion of the French language in the U.S. and of its strong efforts to help educate Haitian child refugees. Haiti's Ambassador to the U.S., Raymond Alcide Joseph, presented the honor to Jane F. Ross, the program's president, in a ceremony on March 1 at the Willard Intercontinental Hotel, on the occasion of the opening reception of the month of la Francophonie. National Security Advisor General James L. Jones, Jr. has also been selected to receive the Grand Prix de la Francophonie award, which was conferred during the same ceremony by Canada's Ambassador to the U.S., Gary Doer. In 2009, the Grand Prix was given to Senator Mary Landrieu of Louisiana for her efforts and those of the state of Louisiana to preserve the use of the French language and the cultural heritage it represents.

The Prix Spécial de la Francophonie is given each year to an American public figure

or association in recognition of their work promoting and developing the values of the Francophone world in the fields of culture and education. This year, the 35 francophone embassies, members of la Francophonie, are placing a special emphasis on Haiti in the wake of its devastating January earthquake. A portion of all proceeds from the Francophonie event in Washington D.C. were donated to charity groups dedicated to disaster relief in Haiti.

The five-year-old French Heritage Language Program (FHLP), run by the non-profit French American Cultural Exchange foundation (FACE), is aimed at disadvantaged Francophone youths who are often recent immigrants. The program offers free, for-credit French classes that build on the cultural heritage of students and help them achieve academic success. Over 500 students have already benefited from this program within the public school system or at community-based centers in New York. FHLP is being honored for these efforts, but also for its quick response to the urgent need for additional

French-language classes following the Haitian earthquake.

The U.S. is now in the process of welcoming thousands of Haitian child refugees, and schools with French programs are unable to meet the increasing enrollment demands from parents eager to continue their children's education in French. FHLP is ideally suited for this critical task, and has just launched classes in Miami, Florida, where many Haitian earthquake victims have sought refuge. The new classes, created with the support of the Haitian Cultural Arts Alliance, the Miami Alliance Française and the French Consulate in Miami, started on February 27 at the Little Haiti Cultural Center, in the presence of French Ambassador Pierre Vimont and Miami's mayor, Tomas P. Regalado. The Heritage program will initially focus its additional efforts on Miami due to its large existing Haitian diaspora, but it hopes to also help in other cities with sizeable Haitian communities, such as Washington D.C. and Boston.