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Security Council Update I: The Situation in Haiti

Introduction

In 2019, the United Nations Security Council (SC) announced the end of the United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti (MINUJUSTH).¹ The mission was the immediate successor of the 2004 United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), which concluded in 2017, thus ending a 15 year-long operation in the island Member State.² This withdrawal of peacekeeping operations was done gradually as stability was re-established by the Haitian National Police (HNP) and the national government, under President Jovenel Moïse.³ Following the aftermath of the 2004 Haitian coup d'état and the 2010 Haitian earthquake, UN officials provided a very limited time for Haiti to stabilize during a period violence and unrest fostered by criminal gangs, overwhelming poverty, and a recent cholera outbreak. The notable absence of UN peacekeepers led to a rise in criminal gang activity and political corruption that contributed to the 2021 assassination of Haitian President Jovenel Moïse and the 2022 takeover of the Haitian capital of Port-au-Prince by local gangs.⁴ With the continual political unrest and the failures of economic recovery efforts, the Republic of Haiti has spiraled into another era of instability, where the call for international re-intervention has intensified from both the Member State's government and citizens.⁵

Gang Violence

Since late 2010, the Republic of Haiti has begun experiencing a growth in gang-related violence and activity.⁶ The World Bank's Climate Change Knowledge Portal shows that the island Member State is particularly vulnerable to natural disasters that have already recently devastated the land, often leaving its' citizens without basic resources.⁷ The notable 2010 earthquake provided gangs with an opportunity to bolster their recruitment by targeting poverty-stricken citizens with food insecurity.⁸ In addition, the United States Institute of Peace published a report highlighting the escape of over 700 convicted gang members from facilities damaged by the earthquake.⁹ The 2021 assassination of President Jovenel Moïse has intensified the violence with a reported 2,100 murders and 1,300

¹ "United Nations peacekeeping operation in Haiti closes amid growing political, security challenges, top peace official tells Security Council," *United Nations Meetings Coverage and Press Releases*, October 15, 2019, accessed United February 19, 2023. <https://press.un.org/en/2019/sc13987.doc.htm>

² "Closure of MINUJUSTH," *United Nations Peacekeeping*, accessed February 19, 2023, <https://minujusth.unmissions.org/en>

³ "United Nations peacekeeping operation in Haiti closes amid growing political, security challenges, top peace official tells Security Council," *United Nations Meetings Coverage and Press Releases*, October 15, 2019, accessed February 19, 2023. <https://press.un.org/en/2019/sc13987.doc.htm>

⁴ "Amid surging gang violence, ongoing political deadlock, Haiti's economic, political heart in state of terror, special representative tells Security Council," *United Nations Meetings Coverage and Press Releases*, June 16, 2022, accessed February 19, 2023. <https://press.un.org/en/2022/sc14934.doc.htm>

⁵ Thomas, M., "Haiti asks world for military help to Curb Chaos,". BBC News, October 8, 2022. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-63181481>

⁶ Louis-Alexandre Berg. *Crime, Politics and Violence in Post-Earthquake Haiti*. Washington, DC: United Institute of Peace (USIP), September 28, 2010. <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/PB%2058%20-%20Crime%20Politics%20and%20Violence%20in%20Post-Earthquake%20Haiti.pdf>

⁷ "Haiti: Vulnerability," *World Bank Climate Change Knowledge Portal*, 2021, accessed February 19, 2023. <https://climateknowledgeportal.worldbank.org/country/haiti/vulnerability>

⁸ United States Institute of Peace (USIP). *Strategic Plan 2020-2022*. Washington, DC. <https://usip.org/sites/default/files/USIP-Strategic-Plan-2020-2022.pdf>

⁹ USIP. *Strategic Plan 2020-2022*.

kidnappings during 2022.¹⁰ This data also includes the July 2022 gang war that occupied the Haitian capital of Port-au-Prince for 48 hours. Now living during these unstable times, Haitian citizens, specifically women and children, are under the constant threat of violence, kidnapping, and extortion orchestrated by these gangs.¹¹ Reports by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH) highlight the usage of systematic sexual violence by gangs to induce fear and control over the local populace.¹² Reported instances of child abductions have also become commonplace, as citizens are trapped between “frontlines” in isolated neighborhoods.¹³ If these gangs remain unaccountable, Haiti’s citizens will continually be exposed to inhumane conditions that violate principle of the 1948 United Nation Declaration of Human Rights.

Cholera Outbreak

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported that the first cholera outbreak in the Republic of Haiti followed the 2010 earthquake that heavily damaged the Member State’s infrastructure.¹⁴ Near the beginning of 2022, the CDC declared that Haiti was cholera-free after a three-year absence of confirmed cases.¹⁵ However, the ongoing worsening of gang violence, social unrest, and famine had severely damaged public health infrastructure and the availability of personnel, and a new strain of cholera re-emerged in late 2022 within the Haitian capital of Port-au-Prince.¹⁶ Since the first confirmed case of the new strain, Haiti re-entered the worst cholera epidemic since 2010 with over 20,000 current confirmed cases.¹⁷ The Haitian medical organization, GHEKSIO, reported that the outbreak had started and worsened within gang-controlled areas that are inaccessible to government health workers.¹⁸ World Health Organization (WHO) officials claim that with this new outbreak children and young adults are the most vulnerable to the disease, and this has only been exacerbated by the level 5 “catastrophic” famine that is currently plaguing the Member State.¹⁹ In addition, human-made insecurity and fuel shortages brought upon by increasing gang violence are also affecting the current resurgence of the disease.²⁰ Haitian citizens and facilities are left with so little fuel that the national water utility cannot pump potable water to at-risk areas.²¹ Neither can the water be transported since government workers are unable to enter these gang-controlled areas without the threat of violence. Thus, these residents are now forced to drink from contaminated water sources that are filled with filth that cannot be filtered nor collected.²²

Recent Developments and Conclusion

The 2023 World Report highlighted a statement by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) that stated that over 42 percent of Haiti’s population needs humanitarian assistance.²³ In addition,

¹⁰ “Police overwhelmed, development stalled, as gang violence spirals in Haiti,” *UN News*, January 24, 2023, accessed February 19, 2023, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/01/1132797>

¹¹ Jacqueline Charles, “Gang-related violence in Haiti has reached levels not seen in decades, UN chief says,” *The Spokesman-Review*. Last modified January 24, 2023, accessed February 19, 2023. <https://www.spokesman.com/stories/2023/jan/24/gang-related-violence-in-haiti-has-reached-levels/>

¹² Jacqueline Charles, “Gang-related violence in Haiti has reached levels not seen in decades, UN chief says,” *The Spokesman-Review*.

¹³ Jacqueline Charles, “Gang-related violence in Haiti has reached levels not seen in decades, UN chief says,” *The Spokesman-Review*.

¹⁴ “Cholera Outbreak - Haiti, September 2022–January 2023,” *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, January 13, 2023, accessed February 19, 2023. <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/72/wr/mm7202a1.htm>

¹⁵ “Cholera Outbreak - Haiti, September 2022–January 2023,” *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*.

¹⁶ “Cholera Outbreak - Haiti, September 2022–January 2023,” *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*

¹⁷ “Cholera Outbreak - Haiti, September 2022–January 2023,” *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*

¹⁸ “Cholera Outbreak - Haiti, September 2022–January 2023,” *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*

¹⁹ “Cholera Outbreak - Haiti, September 2022–January 2023,” *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*

²⁰ Teresa Welsh, “Haiti’s hunger intensified by cholera, gang violence, Ukraine War,” *Devex*. Last modified January 26, 2023, accessed February 20, 2023. <https://www.devex.com/news/haiti-s-hunger-intensified-by-cholera-gang-violence-ukraine-war-104752>

²¹ Teresa Welsh, “Haiti’s hunger intensified by cholera, gang violence, Ukraine War,” *Devex*.

²² Teresa Welsh, “Haiti’s hunger intensified by cholera, gang violence, Ukraine War,” *Devex*.

²³ “Haiti: Events of 2022,” *Human Rights Watch*, last modified February 13, 2023, accessed February 19, 2023. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/haiti>

the OCHA claimed that nearly 40 percent of Haiti's population is experiencing severe famine and food insecurity.²⁴ Acting Haitian president, Prime Minister Ariel Henry, is leading the government without parliamentary approval or a constitutional mandate since former President Jovenel Moise had closed parliament in January 2020.²⁵ The Republic of Haiti has not held elections for any political office for over 3 years. Although Prime Minister Henry promised to hold general elections, this promise has remained unfulfilled.²⁶

Gang violence, communicable diseases, and poverty remain rampant across the Republic. The Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti (IJDH) has documented 20 massacres in the capital of Port-au-Prince since 2018, with no charges filed against assailants.²⁷ Sexual violence has become a "weapon" of fear against women, with the BINUH reporting a monthly average of 98 new victims of sexual violence in gang-controlled areas in 2022.²⁸ Reporters and journalists are also being suppressed and attacked with no form of repercussion or protection by local officials.²⁹ With no attempts of further international aid, citizens have attempted to flee the Member State, but thus far have been quickly deported by neighboring Member States, who claim to be unable to accommodate the fleeing migrants.³⁰ As the international community remains focused on the unrest and conflict in eastern Europe, the violence, starvation, untreated medical needs, and further economic and political collapse only increases in Haiti.

²⁴ "Haiti: Events of 2022," *Human Rights Watch*, last modified February 13, 2023, accessed February 19, 2023. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/haiti>

²⁵ "Haiti: Events of 2022," *Human Rights Watch*.

²⁶ Evens Sanon, "Haiti appoints council amid push to hold general elections," AP NEWS, February 6, 2023, accessed February 19, 2023. <https://apnews.com/article/politics-caribbean-ariel-henry-haiti-61e72730433e284ae165462cfb97b323>

²⁷ "Haiti: Events of 2022," *Human Rights Watch*, last modified February 13, 2023, accessed February 19, 2023. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/haiti>

²⁸ Caitlin Hu, "Rape has become a weapon' for Haiti gangs, says UN," CNN, October 14, 2022, accessed February 19, 2023. <https://www.cnn.com/2022/10/14/americas/haiti-gangs-sexual-violence-intl-latam/index.html>

²⁹ "Haiti: Events of 2022," *Human Rights Watch*, last modified February 13, 2023, accessed February 19, 2023. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/haiti>

³⁰ "Haitians Being Returned to a Country in Chaos," *Human Rights Watch*, March 24, 2022, accessed February 19, 2022. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/03/24/haitians-being-returned-country-chaos>