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BY JAKE JOHNSTON – CHRIS FRANÇOIS

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Haiti Roundup: Thousands Displaced Due to Violence

Tensions in Carrefour Feuilles, a suburb of the capital, are escalating after the police clashed with the population on August 7 during a protest against the devastating violence of the gangs, with reports stating that people couldn't breathe after being tear gassed during a heavily attended march.

Less than a week later, beginning the night of August 12, hundreds of families had to flee their homes after a new wave of attacks believed to be led by the Grand Ravine gang, led by Renel Destina aka Ti Lapli. According to Haiti's Civil Protection Agency and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), from August 12 to August 15, nearly 5,000 individuals were displaced by the ongoing violence. According to the IOM, there are currently more than 200,000 people displaced due to generalized violence.

Armed individuals also attacked the Electricite d'Haiti substation in the area, rendering it inoperative and cutting off electricity not just to Carrefour Feuilles but also to many surrounding towns.

Local residents have denounced the absence of police amid the attacks, mirroring events from last month when police appeared to have abandoned multiple neighborhoods in Port-au-Prince, allowing the Kraze Barye gang led Vitel'homme Innocent to expand its territory.

“With these attacks perpetrated at this moment, it is a scenario to make people believe that only intervention is the solution to the problems of insecurity,” Jean Robert Argant, a human rights advocate, told the Haitian Times.

Kenya Assessment Mission Expected Soon; UN Chief Delivers Report on Intervention Options

On August 4, Barbara Feinstein, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Caribbean Affairs and Haiti, held a press briefing and provided an update on Kenya's offer to lead a multinational force to Haiti:

“The next steps for the Kenyan Government are to perform an assessment on the ground in Haiti, which we expect to take place in the coming weeks, to engage with a wide variety of stakeholders on the ground in Haiti and in New York at the United Nations. Provided the Kenyans are able to secure approval from their own government, they would then work with the United Nations to secure UN authorization of such a force. The United States is prepared to introduce a resolution authorizing an MNF, and we look forward to working with our partners on the Security Council to secure its swift passage. I should also note that by August 15th, the United Nations is to produce a report on security options for Haiti, which will no doubt also influence the shape of such a force.”

The assessment mission is expected to arrive in Haiti as early as this weekend. On August 14th, a State Department spokesperson said that US officials would participate in the assessment mission. At the time of publication, the UN Secretary General's report had yet to be released publicly. However, multiple news agencies have obtained copies (as has HRRW).

In his letter to the Security Council, Antonio Gueterres once again urged member states to support the deployment of “a capable specialized multinational police force enabled by military assets, coordinated with the national police.” Guterres wrote that it would not be a traditional peacekeeping operation, but would operate under the authorization of the Security Council. In calling for the “robust use of force,” Guterres outlined options for how the UN could support such a mission, including logistical and back-end support or expanding the political mission already in the country, BINUH.

“Addressing the security situation in Haiti requires a range of coercive law enforcement measures, including active use of force in targeted police operations against heavily armed gangs,” he wrote.

While not explicitly calling for the US to take an active role, the Secretary General noted that “the active involvement of regional Member States would also be critical” especially in ensuring airlift support.

Prior to Guterres' report, Feinstein said the specifics of US support for such a mission would be determined after the assessment mission, but she noted that the US plans to “robustly support such an initiative.”

Haitian civil society leaders write to African nations and the Russian Federation to express their opposition to a multinational force

Various civil society leaders, including representatives of labor unions, wrote an open letter to other African countries opposing Kenya's decision to lead the multinational force. According to the letter, Kenya's actions go against the African Union's charter, in particular the proclamations on national sovereignty, territorial integrity, and independence.

“No country from the land of our ancestors should serve as the sounding board or weapon of the old colonial and slaveholding powers, who have transformed into imperialists and now are actively engaged in a criminal project of destabilizing Haiti, of systematically sabotaging the country's sovereignty and to which a UN-US occupation would constitute a dangerous stage.”

In their letter, the signatories also highlighted that the flow of arms and munitions to gangs in Haiti was coming from the United States, particularly the state of Florida, and that other nations like Canada had declined to lead the multinational force.

International pan-African organizations like the Frantz Fanon Foundation also criticized the proposed intervention as “illegitimate”, with the foundation cautioning that African states were being instrumentalized for imperial interests, and that the same intervention project could happen in an African country. Others, like the Black Alliance for Peace, have also condemned Kenya's proposition.

A different letter to Dmitry Polyanskiy, Russia's representative in the UN Security Council, was circulated on August 14 and called the current security crisis with the gangs an opportunity for the de facto government to manufacture consent for an intervention. The letter also criticizes the Haitian National Police, reiterating the National Human Rights Defense Network (RNDDH) report that highlighted the ties between gangs, such as Vitel'homme Innocent's Kraze Barye, and the HNP.

Political Negotiations Stall

Guterres, in his report to the Security Council, noted that the deployment of a multinational force should be “guided by the primacy of the political process, anchored in the inter-Haitian political dialogue.” But those efforts appear to have stalled.

Earlier this month various political and economic actors in Haiti engaged in informal discussions over a framework for political negotiations, Le Nouvelliste reported. These meetings took place at the premises of the apostolic nunciature with the mediation of Jonathan Powell (Tony Blair's former chief of staff). The purpose of the informal talks

was to set a negotiation agenda ahead of the next visit from the Caricom Eminent Persons Group, which remains unscheduled.

According to Le Nouvelliste, the talks included de facto prime minister Ariel Henry, representatives from the private sector, the Montana Accord, Fanmi Lavalas, En Avant, OPL, and other signatories to the Kingston joint declaration. Le Nouvelliste reported:

“Ariel Henry seeks to expand the [High Council for the Transition (HCT)], while others desire a bicameral executive with a presidential college. Currently, most actors agree that Ariel Henry’s position is not up for question. He is set to remain as Prime Minister. On the other hand, Dr. Henry has not shown much flexibility regarding the possibility of a bicameral executive. He is focused on an expanded HCT without significant power.”

Opposition and civil society actors appeared to be making a significant concession in taking Henry’s position off the negotiation table, however the de facto prime minister has yet to move on any semblance of power sharing. Despite the lack of consensus, last week the HCT officially relayed the list of experts to constitute the committee on constitutional reform and announced that it was working to form the electoral council necessary to organize future elections.

Growing Calls for US to Stop Propping Up Henry

For many months, civil society organizations have called on the United States to stop propping up de facto prime minister Henry, arguing that such support undercuts any incentive for him to negotiate in good faith.

Patrick Gaspard, a former ambassador during the Obama administration and the current head of the Center for American Progress, discussed the history of direct US intervention in Haiti and emphasized the need for the Biden administration to focus on a democratic transition in the country during a podcast interview with Slate’s Jason Johnson. “The US, UN, and international actors need to understand that the security crisis in Haiti cannot be resolved outside of the governance crisis and a real transition”, he posted on X.

Earlier in July, Antigua and Barbuda’s ambassador to the US and the OAS Ronald Sanders expressed similar sentiments, highlighting that “to give the country the chance it desperately needs, and which Dr. Henry clearly cannot provide, he should consider stepping aside to facilitate the convocation of willing parties to appoint a transitional government in which neither he nor any member of his present regime should participate, unless agreed and accepted by the broad-based grouping.”

Judge Overseeing Assassination Case Calls on Henry

The judge currently presiding over the Moïse's assassination case, Walter Wesser Voltaire, has issued a directive stating he wishes to examine the prime minister, along with various ministers and managing directors in his government. Haiti's former chief prosecutor, Bed-Ford Claude, had previously issued a travel ban against the prime minister in September 2021 and requested he testify as evidence linked him to the assassination. Claude, as well as the minister of justice, were then fired by Henry.

Meanwhile, Alterpresse reported on a statement from a group of civil society organizations saying there would be no progress on the assassination case so long as Henry remains in power. "There is no way to have a judicial system that functions properly when criminals, mafias, and drug dealers are holding the state hostage", noted the release. The groups added that Henry's resignation was also a prerequisite for any legitimate transitional government.

Human Rights Watch releases report on Haiti's security and political crisis

In its latest report on Haiti, Human Rights Watch documented some of the horrific abuses committed by gangs in the country, with data gathered from conducting interviews with 127 people, including victims and witnesses of gang violence, as well as members of Haitian civil society. While those interviewed largely supported an external force to support the Haitian police, they also cautioned against repeating the mistakes and harms of past interventions. The organization echoed the calls of its interviewees, stating:

"Human Rights Watch calls on the UN Security Council to heed these calls, and if it authorizes the consensual deployment of an international force in Haiti, ensure that it is based on clear human rights protocols and has adequate funding and robust oversight mechanisms. These should be complemented by strong measures to ensure accountability that includes Haitian civil society groups, as well as the provision of humanitarian aid and other basic services to those in need."

The report also looked at the country's political gridlock, highlighting the concentration of power in the hands of de facto prime minister Ariel Henry, and worrying evidence of government complicity in massive human rights abuses. Civil society groups interviewed by HRW noted that "meaningful change will likely only happen with the establishment of a new, more legitimate transitional government."

Human Rights Watch called on the US, Canada, France, CARICOM, and other governments to "support the facilitation of the establishment of a transitional government that would work to establish rights-respecting rule of law and provide access to basic

necessities for all Haitians, until democratic elections can provide the basis for the formation of a regular government.”

Crisis at the HNP: Police officers owed 8 months in unpaid wages

The 32nd graduating class of police officers at the HNP have not received their salaries since 8 months ago, according to Lionel Lazarre, a representative of the police union. For some civil servants, they are owed 17 months of unpaid wages. In a statement to RHI News, Lazarre denounced the lack of initiative among Haitian authorities to address this issue:

“You want us to be effective, yet you do not pay us. Despite the hard times, the police officers are still completing their duties. They have a right to their salary. They must be paid. You do not treat men in arms in such a manner.”

The Haitian National Police is a core part of the plans for a multinational intervention force, but as we reported in the last round-up, many officers are also applying to leave the country in the Humanitarian Parole program. The force continues to face difficulties in fighting against the gangs, with a police officer recently killed during confrontations with armed men in Carrefour Feuilles. In total, 26 police officers have been killed from January to July of 2023, according to a report by SYNOPHA.

Guy Philippe to be released from prison next month

Guy Philippe, a former Haitian police officer who led a paramilitary revolt in 2004, is slated for early release from prison next month after 6 years. He was originally sentenced to nine years in US prison after pleading guilty to accepting bribes from drug traffickers.

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Jake Johnston is a Senior Research Associate at the Center for Economic and Policy Research in Washington, D.C. Chris François is an intern in the Center for Economic and Policy Research’s international program.

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