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FEATURED Q&A

Will Haiti's Upcoming Elections Be Free and Fair?

Q Haiti's government said March 15 that it would hold presidential, legislative and local elections later this year. The announcement came two months after the long delay in scheduling elections resulted in the dissolution of Parliament and the beginning of President Michel Martelly's rule by decree in Haiti where, according to *The New York Times*, only 11 elected officials remain in office. Will the elections later this year be free and fair, and what must happen beforehand to ensure that they are? How well has Martelly been governing the country, and is he using restraint in exercising his decree powers? To what extent has Haiti recovered from its devastating 2010 earthquake, and how has the country's political crisis affected the recovery?

A Raymond A. Joseph, former ambassador of Haiti to the United States: "In a communiqué March 21, the Provisional Electoral Council announced 'free, honest, inclusive and democratic elections.' It noted the registration of 192 political parties and groupings for the exercises. There seems to be 'inclusivity' because parties that were protesting against President Martelly are among those registered. Yet, lingering doubts remain about how honest and democratic the elections can be. The March 2 electoral decree stipulates that the 'interim executive agents' must resign 30 days after publication of the decree in order to participate in the elections. Instead of elections for mayors, in 2012 President Martelly had named the 'executive agents' to do his bidding, thereby exerting his influence throughout Haiti. The majority of so-called political parties registered are allies of Tèt Kale (Bald Headed), the president's party. Who will benefit most from the 500 million gourdes (approximately $10.8 million) that the minister of communication said on March 12 would be used to finance the campaigns of the parties? In early March, the U.N.

Continued on page 2

Bolivian Defense Minister Fired Over Controversial Vest

Bolivian Defense Minister Jorge Ledezma was fired Tuesday by the country's president after he wore a vest bearing a controversial motto referring to Bolivia's claim against Chile for Pacific coastline during a trip to the neighboring country. See story on page 2.

File Photo: Bolivian Government.

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NEWS BRIEFS

Cardoso Joining Venezuelan Opposition Leaders' Defense Team

Former Brazilian President Fernando Henrique Cardoso is joining a high-profile defense team that is defending two jailed Venezuelan opposition leaders, BBC News reported Monday. Cardoso accepted an invitation to join the team, which also includes former Spanish Prime Minister Felipe González, former Peruvian President Alan García and former Canadian Justice Minister Irwin Cotler. They are defending Leopoldo López, who was jailed in February 2014, and Caracas Mayor Antonio Ledezma, who was imprisoned last month.

Mexico's Government Planning More Budget Cuts in 2016

Mexico's government said Tuesday that it plans further budget cuts for 2016 as it looks to continue reducing fiscal deficits during a period of lower oil prices, *The Wall Street Journal* reported. Mexico's finance ministry said in a preliminary plan presented to Congress that it will lower spending next year by 135 billion pesos ($8.8 billion) in addition to 124 billion pesos it cut from this year's budget. It projects a fiscal deficit of 3 percent in 2016 compared to 3.5 percent this year.

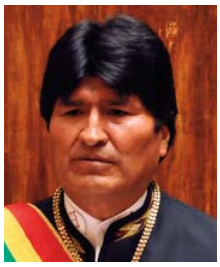
Chile's SQM Takes $7 Mn Charge Amid Campaign Finance Scandal

Chilean fertilizer group **SQM** on Tuesday took a $7 million charge to first-quarter earnings as an alleged tax and illicit campaign financing scandal worsened, and company board members face investigation by securities regulators, Reuters reported. Authorities are looking into claims that money from SQM and other companies was improperly directed to campaigns, especially of the right-wing UDI party.

Political News

Bolivian Defense Minister Fired Over Controversial Vest

Bolivian President Evo Morales on Tuesday fired his defense minister, Jorge Ledezma, for wearing a vest with a controversial logo during a visit to Chile, BBC News reported. Ledezma wore the vest bearing the motto "The sea belongs to Bolivia," which refers to Bolivia's claim to a 250-mile stretch of coastline that it lost to Chile 136 years ago during the War of the Pacific. Ledezma wore the vest during a visit to the northern town of Copiapó to distribute drinking water to victims of flooding in the area. Heavy rains in the area have left at least 23 people dead and 57 missing. Ledezma told a local radio station that he was in Chile to help the victims and not provoke them. He added that he frequently wears the vest and stands behind the logo's sentiment. However, Ledezma said he put the vest on simply because he was cold and did not intend to raise the conflict over the coastline during his visit to Chile. Chile's foreign minister, Heraldo Muñoz, reacted to the incident by saying that his country appreciated the help from Bolivia, but added that "this tragedy should not be used for political purposes." In an apology to Chile, Morales said wearing the vest had been Ledezma's personal decision. "We can't commit these types of errors. No minister is autonomous, and there's no room for personal decisions," Morales said in swearing in Ledezma's replacement, Reymi Ferreira. A former university rector, Ferreira vowed to "faithfully carry out the policies of the government," according to TeleSur.



Morales

File Photo: Bolivian Government.

Strike Cripples Public Transit in Cities Across Argentina

Public transit in major cities across Argentina ground to a halt on Tuesday as transport unions went on strike to demand tax cuts for lower-income workers, Agence France-Presse reported. Trains and subways in Buenos Aires shut down for 24 hours beginning at midnight, and a number of major regional airlines, including Chile's **LAN** and Brazil's **TAM**, canceled international flights to Argentina for the day, while many businesses remained closed. Transit was also halted in Córdoba and Rosario. The strike was called by unions opposed to the government of President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner and was the fourth major stoppage during her administration. The

Featured Q&A

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Development Program said it had $37.9 million for the elections. After four years of resistance, President Martelly agreed to a constitutional electoral council that was acceptable to most. But through his 'interim executive agents,' he managed, with state funding, to set up a machine that will have much sway in the coming elections. Undoubtedly, contestations will abound—to the detriment of Haiti, which has failed to benefit from the more than $10 billion pledged by the international community for its recovery after the Jan. 12, 2010 earthquake."

A Robert Maguire, director of the Latin American and Hemispheric Studies Program and the Focus-on-Haiti Initiative at the Elliott School of International Affairs at The George Washington University: "Pressure from Haitian moderates, opposition politicians and international actors appears to have finally pushed Haitian President Martelly and his opponents to accede to elections, announced by a recently reformed electoral council for Aug. 9 (legislative), Oct. 25 (legislative runoff,

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workers are demanding that the government raise the minimum threshold for paying income tax, which they say hurts the lowest workers because it has not been updated to reflect inflation. The tax applies a 9 percent charge on salaries over 15,000 pesos ($1,700 a month) and rises to about 35 percent for the highest earners. Inflation has exceeded 20 percent annually since 2006 and is now at about 30 percent, independent analysts estimate. Fernández, whose term ends after elections on Oct. 25, criticized the strike, which was also joined by workers in the medical, banking, food and trucking sectors. Over the weekend, Economy Minister Axel Kicillof said the government was not planning any change and that the tax affects only "the highest-earning minority." Last year, the government avoided a similar strike by making December bonuses exempt from income tax. Unions have threatened a longer strike if their demands are not met.

Economy Minister Axel Kicillof said the tax affects only "the highest-earning minority."

Company News

Brazil's BM&F Bovespa Buys 2% Stake in Santiago Exchange

Brazil's **BM&F Bovespa** financial exchange on Tuesday bought a 2 percent stake in Chile's **Bolsa de Comercio de Santiago** for approximately 10.3 million reais ($3.2 million), Reuters reported. BM&F Bovespa, which is headquartered in São Paulo, purchased the stake through an auction at the Santiago exchange. The chief executive officer of Brazil's lone exchange, Edemir Pinto, said last month that the company "will continue to evaluate" ways it can expand and wants to buy stakes in the main bourses of Argentina, Colombia, Mexico and Peru, in addition to Chile.

In Focus

Mexico Seeing Some Gains in Reducing Homicides: Embassy

By Gene Kuleta

WASHINGTON—Although rates of homicide remain high in Mexico, the country's efforts to improve security are advancing, a Mexican Embassy official said Tuesday at the Inter-American Dialogue.

Canales

Photo: Inter-American Dialogue.

The country's murder rate peaked in 2011 at about 23 homicides per 100,000 civilians and has declined to approximately 18 per 100,000, roughly the same as in 2007, Rodrigo Canales, the chief policy advisor at the Mexican Embassy in Washington, said during a panel discussion on security in Mexico. "The trend is promising, but we're nowhere near satisfied," said Canales. "We seem to be moving in the right direction."

Last week, protesters in at least 10 Mexican states marked the six-month anniversary of the disappearance of 43 college students in the city of Iguala, in Guerrero state. Nearly 100 people, including the then-mayor of Iguala and his wife, have been detained in connection with the incident.

Mexican Attorney General Jesús Murillo Karam has said that the students were abducted by corrupt local police officers and then handed over to members of a drug gang who killed them and incinerated their bodies. Canales said the administration of President Enrique Peña Nieto is seeking to improve security by strengthening the country's institutions, including its police forces, judiciary and prison system.

Also at Tuesday's discussion, Maureen Meyer, senior associate for Mexico and migrant rights at the Washington Office on Latin America, said Mexico must focus on human rights while it tackles insecurity. "There are a lot of widespread concerns about human rights in Mexico," said Meyer. "Confessions are still being used that were obtained through torture." Mexico also must stop relying on the military to provide internal security, she said. Canales said Peña Nieto's government is committed to moving away from using the military to perform policing functions, but added that "right now, we don't have a better tool."

Also during the panel discussion, Enrique Betancourt, director of the urban security initiative at international development company **Chemonics International** and former executive director of Mexico's National Center for Crime Prevention, said that authorities in Mexico must focus on targeted interventions in specific areas because the country's homicide rate is significantly higher than the national average in locations such as Ciudad Juárez.

Betancourt also said that Mexican officials must continue to work to bring down the homicide rate. "It's very dangerous when these trends tend to plateau," Betancourt told the *Advisor* in an interview.

He added that although the homicide rate has decreased nationwide, other crimes such as extortion, kidnapping and corruption have increased over the past two years. Those types of crimes are of particular concern to businesses that are considering operations and investment in Mexico, he said.

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Featured Q&A

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presidential first round and local), and Dec. 27 (presidential runoff). Given that electoral shenanigans—usually managed by those already in power—are common in Haiti and that Martelly currently rules without parliamentary checks on his power, there is no guarantee that elections will be free, fair and inclusive. Concerning the latter, it is heartening that major opposition groups, including Aristide's Lavalas Family, have indicated a willingness to participate. Concerning free and fair, it will be of extreme importance to put in place whatever constraints are feasible to limit inevitable attempts of pre- or post-voting manipulation—including a massive, long-term presence of Haitian civil society and international observers. This is particularly important given Martelly's by now well-known autocratic tendencies and his track record of manipulating Haiti's judiciary. Hopefully, and in breaking with the past, these elections will be more about policies to confront Haiti's chronic poverty, inequality, ravaged environment and lack of opportunity and economic development than about personality. Although Martelly's government has been at the helm while important post-earthquake recovery steps such as rubble removal, nascent infrastructure rehabilitation and a decline in extreme poverty have occurred, these gains have been accomplished not by sound public policies, but principally by unsustainable flows of post-quake aid dollars that are already in decline."

Rafael Cox Alomar, assistant professor of law at the David A. Clarke School of Law at the University of the District of Columbia: "Haiti stands today crippled by authoritarianism, corruption and an endless cycle of political violence. On the surface, however, things appear to have taken a turn for the better if compared to how they looked in the aftermath of the 2010 earthquake. The rubble has been cleared, and millions of Haitians are no longer living in tents along the streets of Port-au-Prince. Yet, once the surface is scratched, an ugly picture begins to emerge. The dissolution of Parliament in January has led to massive unrest in the streets of Haiti. In open violation of the Haitian Constitution, the Martelly administration never held the legislative and municipal elections the country was supposed to have three years ago. President Martelly has preferred, instead, to rule by decree. With no discernible electoral law, and no operational structure for running an election, it is highly unlikely the upcoming presidential, legislative and municipal elections will command much legitimacy in a country besieged by ancestral distrusts and political balkanization. The unavailability of credible lists of registered voters, due in great measure to a deficient and outdated national identification card system, might lead to widespread disenfranchisement and political violence. The absence of adequate personnel for transporting and distributing ballots to and from electoral units to tabulation centers, particularly in light of the imminent departure of significant numbers of U.N. peacekeeping forces, stands as a major obstacle. The U.N. Security Council is well advised in staying the course in Haiti. This is not the time for hasty withdrawals."

> "It is highly unlikely the upcoming ... elections will command much legitimacy in a country besieged by ancestral distrusts and political balkanization."
>
> *— Rafael Cox Alomar*

The Advisor *welcomes reactions to the Q&A above. Readers can write editor Gene Kuleta at gkuleta@thedialogue.org with comments.*

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