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FEATURED Q&A

Can Haiti Reverse Spiraling Violence and Kidnappings?



President Jovenel Moïse recently acknowledged that efforts to fight insecurity in Haiti have been "ineffective." // File Photo: Haitian Government.

Q Haiti is wracked by deepening political unrest and economic misery, as well as a rash of kidnappings, which, according to the United Nations, tripled last year. President Jovenel Moïse acknowledged on April 14 that efforts to fight insecurity have been "ineffective," and the Roman Catholic archdiocese of Port-au-Prince recently said the country's society is suffering a "descent into hell." What are the reasons behind the surge of kidnappings and worsening insecurity in Haiti, and why haven't policies to improve security worked? Is Moïse able to turn the country around, or should he step down? What kind of international support does Haiti need, and does enough political will exist among international actors to deliver such support?

A Bocchit Edmond, Haiti's ambassador to the United States: "The insecurity challenges in Haiti are incredibly nuanced and multifaceted. Considering this reality, the Moïse administration has increased the national budget for the Haitian National Police by 53 percent to strengthen its capacity and implemented an aggressive policy to dismantle gangs. Out of 102 existing gangs, the government has dismantled 64. It is significant to note that the rise in insecurity is politically motivated due to reforms in various sectors across Haiti. The government has ended currency manipulation and contracts gained through corruption. These cases involve more than \$6 billion in interest. Consequently, the government is facing a powerful lobby with significant means. Peyi lòk in 2019, financed and supported by some of these interest groups, caused severe economic damage, with nearly

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U.N. Expresses Alarm Over Violence Against Protesters in Cali

The human rights office of the United Nations said it was "deeply alarmed" over violence against protesters in the Colombian city of Cali.

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WhatsApp has restarted a person-to-person payments feature in Brazil, following a first attempt last year that regulators halted.

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Argentina's Supreme Court overruled a decree by President Alberto Fernández to close schools in Buenos Aires due to an increase in Covid-19 cases.

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Fernández // File Photo: Argentine Government.

POLITICAL NEWS

U.N. Alarmed Over Violence Against Protesters in Cali

The human rights office of the United Nations on Tuesday expressed “deep alarm” over violence against protesters in the Colombian city of Cali, where it said “a number of people were reportedly killed and wounded when police opened fire on demonstrators.” The human rights office, or OHCHR, was working to verify the number of casualties and determine how the incident happened, said spokeswoman Marta Hurtado. “We express our profound shock at the events there and stress our solidarity with those who have lost their lives, as well as the injured and their families,” she said in a statement. At least 19 people have been killed and hundreds of others have been wounded in Colombia since protests erupted after President Iván Duque’s government proposed a controversial tax reform plan, *The New York Times* reported Monday. That death toll does not include any casualties that occurred Monday night. Duque withdrew the plan on Sunday, and Finance Minister Alberto Carasquilla resigned over it on Monday, but the moves have not quelled public anger, and protesters have continued taking to the streets over a litany of grievances including unemployment, rising poverty rates and inequality that have been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. The novel coronavirus and the spread of a variant first identified in Brazil have pummeled much of South America, and many countries in the region face bleak fiscal conditions if they do not undertake reforms. From the protests in Colombia, several videos have emerged online showing police officers using excessive force against protesters and in some cases, shooting demonstrators at point-blank range, the Associated Press reported. In a statement, the United Nations’ Hurtado called on Colombian authorities to use restraint. “We stress also that law enforcement officers should abide by the principles of legality, precaution, necessity and proportionality when policing demonstra-

tions. Firearms can only be used as a measure of last resort against an imminent threat to life or of serious injury,” she said. The European Union also condemned violence, urged calm and called on security forces to use restraint, Reuters reported. The U.N. statement added that there have been calls for a “massive demonstration” today.

Venezuela Names Opposition Leaders to Electoral Board

Venezuela’s ruling party-controlled National Assembly named two opposition leaders, including a formerly imprisoned activist, as election officials on Tuesday, a move that some analysts see as President Nicolás Maduro’s latest conciliatory signal to the administration of U.S. President Joe Biden, the Associated Press reported. It is the first time since 2005 that the Venezuelan opposition will hold two seats on the five-person National Electoral Council, or CNE, which monitors elections in the Andean nation. The two new council members are former lawmaker Enrique Marquez and strategist Roberto Picón, who was jailed for six months in 2017 after organizing a symbolic vote parallel to Maduro’s referendum on creating a constitutional assembly. Critics of the government say the council has for years been stacked with allies who function as a proxy for the Maduro administration. An agreement with Maduro was reportedly reached following behind-the-scenes negotiations between representatives of the government and moderate opposition in recent weeks, the AP reported. Some of the opposition members who engaged in talks are reportedly with former presidential candidate Henrique Capriles. “Today’s appointment of a new electoral authority (CNE) in #Venezuela, with an increased opposition presence, is the strongest hint yet that @NicolasMaduro wants a thaw in relations with Washington,” Phil Gunson, a Caracas-based senior analyst with International Crisis Group, wrote on Twitter. However, the CNE announcement also prompted criticism. OAS Secretary General Luis Almagro on Tuesday issued a statement

NEWS BRIEFS

Chile’s Proposed Royalties ‘Akin to Expropriation’: Mining Industry Group

Legislation that would force mining companies to pay higher royalties is “akin to expropriation” and would paralyze investment in the sector, Chile’s National Mining Society, or Sonami, said Tuesday, Reuters reported. The plan proposes a tax of at least 3 percent on sales of copper and lithium. Opposition lawmakers are pushing the measure as a way to pay for more expansive social programs as the country seeks to recover from the Covid-19 pandemic. The Chamber of Deputies is expected to vote on the measure on Thursday.

Argentine Supreme Court Overrules President’s Decree to Shut Schools

Argentina’s Supreme Court on Tuesday overruled President Alberto Fernández’s decree to shut down schools in Buenos Aires due to an increase in Covid-19 cases, Reuters reported. The decision is a win for the city government, which defied Fernández’s April decree and sought to keep schools open. The ruling said the presidential decree violated the legally enshrined autonomy of the city of Buenos Aires. [Editor’s note: See related [Q&A](#) on Fernández’s handling of the pandemic in the April 15 issue of the Advisor.]

El Salvador Signs Deal With Pfizer for 4.4 Million Doses of Vaccine

El Salvador’s government has signed an agreement with Pfizer for 4.4 million Covid-19 vaccine doses, President Nayib Bukele said Tuesday on Twitter. “With this purchase, we guarantee uninterrupted immunization for our entire population,” Bukele wrote. El Salvador had previously reached an agreement with China to provide 150,000 doses of Chinese-made vaccines against the novel coronavirus.

rejecting and condemning “the dictatorship’s actions,” which it described as “contrary to the democratic rule of law.”

BUSINESS NEWS

WhatsApp Makes Second Attempt at Brazil P2P Payments

WhatsApp has restarted a person-to-person, or P2P, payments feature in Brazil after regulators last year blocked the messaging service’s first attempt at rolling out the feature, the Facebook-owned messaging app said on Tuesday, the Financial Times reported. The newly relaunched service will allow users to use debit or pre-paid card numbers to send each other as much as 5,000 reais (\$927) per month free of charge, Reuters reported. Brazil is WhatsApp’s second-largest market after India, with 120 million users. The South American nation is where WhatsApp first tried a nationwide rollout of P2P payments last June, although the service was suspended after about a week when the country’s central bank told Visa and Mastercard to stop processing payments through the app over concerns about competition, efficiency and data privacy, the Financial Times reported. Brazil’s antitrust regulator also had halted WhatsApp’s partnership with Cielo, a local transaction processor, citing market concentration concerns. Brazil’s central bank recently granted a license for P2P payments to a local subsidiary of Facebook, allowing WhatsApp to proceed with launching the payments service, with it first being available to users in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. Although the rollout of the P2P feature will be phased, some users will be able to start sending money as soon as today, Chief Operating Officer Matthew Idema said in an interview with Reuters. WhatsApp said it is also planning to launch a business payments service in the Brazilian market. [Editor’s note: See related [Q&A](#) on payments in Brazil in the July 2-15, 2020 issue of the Dialogue’s biweekly Financial Services Advisor.]

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\$2.4 billion and about 80,000 jobs lost. On Sept. 19, Haiti will hold its general elections with the support of international partners, ensuring a democratic transfer of power to a new administration chosen by the people. President Moïse’s term ends on Feb. 7, 2022. Haiti will also hold a referendum on the new constitution on June 27. The government intends to utilize all its resources to improve the sociopolitical climate to ensure that the deadlines are met and that the elections can be held in optimal conditions with the broadest possible participation of candidates and voters. We welcome foreign assistance with our electoral process in funding for elections, international observers or other means. The Haitian government has been working with the country’s friends and allies, including the Organization of American States and the United Nations, to ensure free, fair, transparent and inclusive elections. We are committed to holding credible and legitimate elections that will stand up to international scrutiny.”

A Jacky Lumarque, member of the Inter-American Dialogue and rector of Université Quisqueya in Port-au-Prince: “President Jovenel Moïse has said that 80 percent of Haiti’s kidnappings are political, suggesting that insecurity was a weapon used by the opposition. Paradoxically, the main human rights organizations have documented the authorities’ complicity in the rise in insecurity and kidnappings. The measures taken have not reassured the population and have had the opposite effect by reinforcing the audacity of the kidnappers. No known gang leaders have been arrested despite their open appearance in public events, nor has anything been done about any of the high-profile assassinations. Most law experts and political analysts agree that Moïse’s term ended last February. While the government and its international allies (the United States, the OAS and the United Nations) present a different interpretation, the

consequence is a weakening of the president’s legitimacy. Instability has even moved from the streets to the government itself: a dysfunctional parliament, five prime ministers and four police chiefs in four years, and a portion of the police force in open rebellion against the leadership in a battle for union recognition. Haitian political actors too often turn to Washington for support, either to stay in power or to overthrow an established power. In view of the lessons of these failed external interventions—including Moïse’s invitation to the OAS to intervene in his proposed elections—the best support that the international community can show is to stay out and affirm its neutrality with respect to the solutions envisaged by Haitians themselves.”

A Juan Gabriel Valdés, former special representative and head of the U.N. mission in Haiti and former Chilean ambassador to the United States: “The Haitian state has practically disappeared. Its institutions, always weak in the past, have collapsed before the autocratic character of an executive branch that has not hesitated to systematically violate the constitution in order to accumulate power. The increase in poverty and urbanization in neighborhoods of Port-au-Prince has multiplied an evil that Haiti has carried for a long time: the existence of armed gangs that live off the kidnapping of people. The police lack sufficient preparation, and support from the government has not been clear. There are many Haitians who think high public or private spheres have some degree of complicity with the kidnappings. Furthermore, as has been proven in the past, the kidnappers do not come only from shantytowns and can constitute profitable businesses. The drama is that this ‘industry’ is growing without any restraint from any authority. After overwhelming the other public powers, the only one left standing is the government of Jovenel Moïse; but, at the same time,

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everything he does lacks legitimacy. After resisting demonstrations against him, and in a context in which he feels supported by international organizations and the silence of the new administration in Washington, the president continues to advance an autocratic project, with a plebiscite on a constitutional reform that does not have the least possibility of being considered legitimate, as well as elections organized under his mandate. The well-known 'Haitian fatigue' is apparent in the international community, but in Haiti there is also enormous fatigue with international intervention. The current crisis is greater than the one in 2004, which caused the start of Minustah. The international community has no choice but to clearly point out the current government's illegitimacy and inability to resolve a crisis that progressively dissolves all semblance of society. This implies facilitating an exit through a transitional government. The latter may later call elections and control violence. The basic principle is that only a government that has institutional and popular legitimacy can do both."

A **Gabrielle Apollon, Haiti project co-director at the Global Justice Clinic of the New York University School of Law:** "Human rights defenders in Haiti have been sounding the alarm about rising insecurity and the Moïse administration's connections to deadly attacks against the most vulnerable since 2018. Analyzing these attacks, a recent [report](#) from Harvard Law School's International Human Rights Clinic and the Haitian Observatory of Crimes against Humanity found that the 'pattern of state-sanctioned violence, human rights abuses, and refusal to hold perpetrators accountable ... likely

amounts to crimes against humanity.' This impunity and violence define the current moment in Haiti. Human rights defenders' mobilization and mass participation of Haitian civil society demands recognition by the United States and other states in the

“ This impunity and violence define the current moment in Haiti.”

– Gabrielle Apollon

Americas of the Haitian people's right to self-determination. Through demonstrations, strikes and acts of solidarity, the Haitian people have denounced state-sanctioned violence, made clear that Moïse has overstayed his mandate and lost legitimacy, and uncovered the impossibility of free, fair and credible elections organized by his administration—not to mention an unconstitutional referendum. While 69 U.S. House Democrats expressed their deep concern regarding Moïse's ability to fairly administer elections in a [letter](#) last week, it remains to be seen whether the international community can muster sufficient political will to censure Moïse's unconstitutional actions. Meanwhile, the Biden administration continues to expel thousands of Haitians seeking refuge at the U.S.-Mexico border, using a Trump-era public health order as authorization. At the very least, not one more person should be deported to Haiti at this time of extraordinary crisis."

The Advisor welcomes comments on its Q&A section. Readers can write editor Gene Kuleta at gkuleta@thedialogue.org.

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