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**FEATURED Q&A**

# Can Haiti Be Stabilized in the Coming Months?

The new OAS secretary-general has called for a new strategy for stabilizing the multiple crises engulfing Haiti. The country's capital, Port-au-Prince, is pictured. // File Photo: AlbertoHektor via Adobe Stock.

**Q Organization of American States Secretary-General Albert Ramdin wants stakeholders to agree to a new strategy for addressing the security, humanitarian and political crises in Haiti, he said in his inaugural address on May 30. In a subsequent interview with the Advisor, Ramdin did not rule out engagement with gangs as authorities seek to stabilize Haiti's security situation before the Transitional Presidential Council's mandate expires in February 2026. How feasible is Ramdin's call for stabilizing Haiti? Could a political solution involve negotiation with organized criminal groups? What steps can multilateral organizations including the OAS take to improve security in the eight months remaining in the transitional council's mandate?**

**A Evallière Beauplan, former senator of the Republic of Haiti and president of the MOLHA party and SOLID coalition of parties:** "SOLID welcomes the OAS secretary-general's call for Haitian stakeholders to agree on a common strategy to address the country's multiple crises. This hopeful call reflects an international desire to see Haiti return to stability and constitutional order. However, the implementation of such a vision remains uncertain due to the current configuration of the Transitional Presidential Council. In practice, the composition of the nine-member council with divergent ideologies constitutes a major source of blockage—internal dissensions and partisan interests undermine its effectiveness, to the detriment of the nation's higher interests. Almost the entire metropolitan capital area is beyond the control of the authorities. Added to this is 45 percent of

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## Petrobras, Exxon, Chevron Win Brazil Offshore Exploration Rights

Brazil's national hydrocarbons agency on Tuesday awarded offshore exploration rights for several blocks in deep waters near the equator.

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BUSINESS

## Santander's Mexico Digital Bank Hits 110,000 Customers

Less than four months after its launch, Openbank, Santander's digital bank in Mexico, has reached 110,000 customers, the Spain-based bank announced.

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ECONOMIC

## Colombia's Senate Approves Labor Reform Package

Colombia's Senate late Tuesday approved a labor reform package pushed by President Gustavo Petro. The measure would enshrine into law an eight-hour workday, among other provisions.

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Petro // File Photo: Colombian Government.

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ECONOMIC NEWS

# Colombian Senate Approves Labor Reform Package

Colombia's Senate late Tuesday approved a long-debated labor reform that President Gustavo Petro has pushed, a development that came just days after Petro said he would seek the measure's approval in a referendum, Reuters reported. The reform includes enshrining into law an eight-hour workday as well as increased weekend and holiday pay, the wire service reported. It also would require delivery app drivers to pay into the country's social security system. Senators passed the reform on a vote of 57-31. The Senate and the lower house of Congress would now have to reconcile differences in each chamber's version of the bill before it can become law, the Associated Press reported. After lawmakers rejected the reforms twice, most recently in March, Petro last week signed a decree that would put the reform to voters in a referendum in August. Petro's government has said it may cancel the planned referendum if the overhaul is approved along the lines of its agenda, Reuters reported. On Tuesday, Labor Minister Antonio Sanguino welcomed the Senate's approval of the reform. "The government is satisfied, we have managed, vote by vote, article by article, a new democratic, progressive labor legislation," said Sanguino. Analysts have estimated that the reform would raise labor costs by 6.8 percent to 35 percent, Reuters reported. Bruce Mac Master, the leader of ANDI, Colombia's largest business association, has said the changes would hurt small and medium-sized businesses, and he warned that it could lead to job losses and higher levels of informal employment, Bloomberg News reported.

**SUBSCRIBER NOTICE**

The Latin America Advisor will not be published on Thursday, June 19 in observance of the Juneteenth federal holiday in the United States. We will resume publishing on Friday, June 20.

BUSINESS NEWS

# Petrobras, Chevron, Exxon Win Brazil Exploration Rights

Brazil's national hydrocarbons regulatory agency on Tuesday approved the sale of 19 deep-water oil and gas blocks off the country's northern coastline to state-run Petrobras and U.S.-based oil majors Chevron and ExxonMobil, Bloomberg News reported. A consortium of companies including Petrobras and ExxonMobil was awarded rights to explore for hydrocarbons in 10 offshore areas; each company will operate five blocks. Brazil's National Petroleum Agency also approved the sale of nine exploration blocks to a joint venture between Chevron and Chinese state-run oil firm CNPC, with Chevron set to operate all nine blocks. All of the 19 blocks are located in the Foz do Amazonas basin, which is located off the coast of Brazil's Amapá state. Federal environmental agency IBAMA has yet to issue final approval for Petrobras' plans to begin drilling for oil at a separate exploration block in the Foz do Amazonas basin. The area is in the Amazon biome; regulators and nongovernmental organizations have voiced concerns over the potential effects of an oil spill on local biodiversity, Reuters reported. Petrobras CEO Magda Chambriard told the wire service earlier this month that she expects IBAMA to issue its approval for the pre-existing exploration project in the second half of July. The Foz do Amazonas basin is part of the larger Equatorial Margin oil deposit, which is located along and off of Brazil's northern coastline. Brazilian hydrocarbons planners consider the development of the formation, which shares geology with Guyana and Suriname's oil reserves, as key to sustaining Brazil's oil and gas production in the future after existing fields in the Campos and Santos basins reach maturity, Bloomberg News reported. Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva has publicly called for IBAMA to expedite approval of Petrobras' Foz do Amazonas exploration permit as recently as February of this year. "We scooped up what we wanted and seeing more

NEWS BRIEFS

## Argentina's Fernández de Kirchner Granted House Arrest After Sentencing

A federal judge in Argentina on Tuesday granted former President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner the ability to serve her six-year prison sentence under house arrest, Reuters reported. Argentina's Supreme Court last week had upheld the conviction for abuse of public funds for the former first lady, president and vice president, who has led the primary opposition party to President Javier Milei since last year. Thousands of supporters took to the streets of Buenos Aires Tuesday to protest on behalf of Fernández de Kirchner, Reuters reported.

## Pemex's Oil Services Debt Could Force Exits in July

An increasing frequency of unfulfilled payments from Mexican state-owned oil and gas firm Pemex to a number oil services companies could force firms including Halliburton and Grupo México to halt their business with Pemex as soon as next month, a group representing Mexico's oil services sector said in a letter this week to President Claudia Sheinbaum, Reuters reported on Tuesday. Pemex currently has around $20 billion in total debt to suppliers and service contractors, in addition to more than $100 billion in other liabilities.

## Canada Eyes Domestic Metals Rules for Gov't-Funded Infrastructure

Officials in Canada are considering new requirements that would mandate government-funded infrastructure projects and defense-procurement deals to use domestically produced steel and aluminum, Industry Minister Mélanie Joly said Tuesday, The Wall Street Journal reported. The consideration follows U.S. President Donald Trump's imposition of 50 percent tariffs on imports of the metals.

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companies getting in, the majors, puts more pressure on the license for exploration in the Equatorial Margin to be granted," an unnamed source at Petrobras told Reuters on Tuesday. Brazil's government will obtain $181 million in signing bonuses for the oil exploration rights it granted this week, Bloomberg News reported.

# Santander's Digital Bank in Mexico Has 110,000 Customers

Openbank, the full digital bank of Spain-based Grupo Santander, has reached 110,000 customers in Mexico less than four months after starting operations there, Santander announced Tuesday. Since launching operations in Mexico in February, Openbank has captured more than 60 million euros in customer deposits, "which reflects users' trust in a digital proposition backed by Santander," the bank said in a statement. Santander added that the milestone "confirms that more Mexicans are seeking digital financial solutions that fit their dynamic lifestyle and that are intuitive, accessible and secure." Matías Núñez Castro, the CEO of Openbank Mexico, said the growth in Openbank's customer base in Mexico "confirms the great potential of our 100 percent digital banking model in the Mexican market." He added, "This is the first step of a clear strategy: to make Openbank the most empathetic, efficient and approachable digital banking model in Mexico, where people can take control of their finances in a simple, agile and secure way." Openbank offers digital products including its Open Light and Open+ Debit Accounts, which have a fixed annual return of 10 percent, as well as its Open Credit Card, which offers 3 percent cash back on purchases and allows customers to finance online purchases interest-free over three months, Santander said. Openbank also offers protections for online purchases made with its credit card, Santander said. The bank has recently added features that include a customer service chatbot. In coming months, Openbank plans to expand its range of products by launching insurance and personal loan offerings, Santander said.

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the territory of the Artibonite department, as well as the communes of Saut-d'Eau and Mirebalais. Nearly three million people are displaced. In this context, the hope of organizing a constitutional referendum by February 2026 appears highly compromised. Regarding negotiations with criminal groups, SOLID categorically rejects this perspective. Dealing with organizations designated as terrorists by the international community would undermine the legitimacy of institutions and the authority of the state. The vast majority of national opinion has already opposed this approach. Faced with the failure of the current team, SOLID calls on the OAS and other multilateral partners to quickly facilitate the establishment of a new, more limited structure with a clear mandate and a realistic road map. The support of our Latin American partners, particularly in the security sector, remains a top priority to create the minimum conditions for recovery."

**Ronald Sanders, ambassador of Antigua and Barbuda to the United States and the Organization of American States:** "What is certain is that, without a significant use of force to dislodge the gangs' stranglehold in Haiti, security will not improve, nor will a constitutional referendum occur by February 2026. However, such a force is most unlikely. The U.N. Security Council would not authorize it, and the OAS Charter does not permit it. So, Secretary-General Ramdin is right to pursue a new strategy. Any realistic strategy must face this central reality: The gangs have a strong and determinative presence, with substantial firepower and almost no incentive to disarm unilaterally. A greater realism is required. This demands cooperation among the U.N. and OAS secretaries-general, key U.N. Security Council members and the Haitian Transitional Council to establish a short-term stabilization plan in conjunction with a long-term economic transformation agenda. The short-term plan must provide targeted support to strengthen Haitian institutions, particularly the Haitian National Police, and bolster any feasible international security mission. Essentially, the strategy must also involve engagement with gang leadership, not to give them a share in power, but rather to provide them with incentives to cooperate in establishing the rule of law. History shows that dialogue, however difficult, has helped to resolve internal conflicts; without it, the status quo will persist."

**Tarlie Francis, ambassador of Grenada to the United States and the Organization of American States:** "While admirable in its ambition, the feasibility of achieving Ramdin's goals by February 2026 presents significant challenges. The security vacuum in Haiti is profound, and for democratic processes like a constitutional referendum and elections to genuinely bear fruit, a fundamental and robust shift in the security landscape is imperative. The current widespread control by organized gangs/criminal groups severely impedes the necessary space for free movement, secure campaigning and genuine public participation. For these democratic aspirations to move beyond rhetoric, more concrete and actionable plans are essential to confront and subdue these elements, including how the necessary military and financial powers can be mobilized legally and effectively. I want to think that Ramdin is now in a position to influence this level of thought and action, moving from words to poignant leaps. So why not? Why be stuck in the 'old' phase? From a pragmatic standpoint, engaging with various actors, including those who exert de-facto control, might be considered to understand power dynamics. However, any such engagement carries immense risks. It must be very carefully calibrated to avoid inadvertently legitimizing criminal enterprises and must fundamentally serve the long-term interests and safety of the Haitian population. Crucially, the legitimacy of any such approach must be rigorously

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weighed against the expressed will and trust of the Haitian people, who have suffered immensely under these groups. Still, the secretary-general's leadership reflects a sober grasp of our region's fragilities and the courage to confront difficult questions. With careful coordination, principled engagement and a clear moral compass, we can still realize a vision of a stable, democratic, and peaceful Haiti—and a hemisphere where, in his words, 'democracy flourishes and human rights are protected, not seen as a threat.'"

**Johanna Leblanc, adjunct professor at Howard University and former senior foreign policy advisor at the Embassy of the Republic of Haiti:** "OAS Secretary-General Albert Ramdin's call for a renewed strategy in Haiti is timely and commendable, but it is constrained by harsh realities on the ground. More than 80 percent of Port-au-Prince is controlled by gangs. According to the United Nations, more than 1.3 million Haitians are displaced, and over 5,000 people have been killed in the past six months alone. Haiti is not just facing a political crisis—it is confronting a national security emergency. Some have called Trump administration's designation of two Haitian gangs as foreign terrorist organizations is a step in the right direction, but it exemplifies political instrumentalism—a policy tool used for optics and to score domestic political points without the necessary enforcement mechanisms to dismantle gang financing and arms networks. Amid institutional fragility, the Haitian government has reportedly hired a private military contractor with a controversial international track record. This reflects desperation but raises legitimate concerns about accountability, sovereignty, and long-term commitment to strengthen Haiti's internal security forces. Given its structural limitations, the OAS is not equipped to lead a military response—but it can play a pivotal role in convening political will, coordinating resources and advocating targeted assistance. That assistance must prioritize bolstering the Haitian National Police and Armed Forces—institutions critical to restoring territorial integrity. Parallel support for constitutional reform and transitional justice—driven by Haitian stakeholders—is essential. However, the OAS can play a role in capacity building. Stabilizing Haiti by February 2026 is aspirational. What is achievable, however, is a principled, sequenced approach that centers Haitian agency and builds toward durable sovereignty."

*The Advisor welcomes comments on its Q&A section. Readers can write editor Gene Kuleta.*

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