



Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission

Haiti: Options for Improving Human Rights and Security
Virtual briefing

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10:00 – 11:00 a.m.

Zoom

As delivered

Good morning. Welcome to the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission briefing on “Haiti: Options for Improving Human Rights and Security.” I welcome our outstanding panel of participants, two of whom are joining us from Haiti.

I have watched with great concern as the security and human rights situation in Haiti has deteriorated since our last hearing on human rights in Haiti in 2020. Over the past year, the crisis has become even worse with the siege of the capital city Port-au-Prince by gangs in early 2024.

The violence committed by these vicious gangs has been devastating, with the death toll exceeding 5,600 people last year. They use sexual violence and rape to terrorize the population

and control access to territory or humanitarian assistance. They forcibly recruit minors.

The gangs use extortion, kidnapping, and arms and drug trafficking to fill their coffers and fuel the conflict. According to the United Nations, the firepower of the gangs surpasses that of the Haitian police. We know that most of these weapons originate in the United States.

The gangs are also more unified now than before. Instead of fighting each other, they are working together to fight the police and the Kenyan-led Multinational Security Support Mission, which lacks enough funding or personnel to make a meaningful improvement in security.

At the same time, we hear of human rights abuses committed by security forces in Haiti.

The Transitional Presidential Council, in place since last April, is charged with governing the country until democratic elections are possible. It is important for the TPC to show a commitment to addressing corruption and reducing impunity. They need to strengthen the institutions that hold accountable those who violate human rights and who enrich themselves by cooperating with the gangs.

There is also a humanitarian crisis. More than a million Haitians are displaced from their homes, half of whom are children. Five and a half million people—half the country—are

living in acute hunger. Haitians have the right to live free from hunger and fear, and they have a right to health, which has been threatened by gang attacks on hospitals and health centers. We have a responsibility to help.

Conditions in Haiti right now are devastating. We are looking to learn from the benefits and shortcomings of past approaches, and support initiatives that address the root causes of the violence.

The people working on the front lines in Haitian communities to save lives, heal the sick, fight for justice, and shine a light on corruption have expertise to offer.

Today, we have representatives of civil society organizations to share their knowledge about what is working at local levels, and generate ideas for increasing restorative justice, addressing impunity, and protecting vulnerable groups in Haiti.

We hope today to hear ideas and policy proposals that Congress can follow up on. I believe strongly that Haiti deserves our help, and that we can and should do more to help improve the security and human rights situation in the country.

I thank all of you for joining us today. I now turn to our moderator, Karla Rios, from the Congressional Research Service.