

House Foreign Affairs Committee
Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission

Virtual Briefing on
Haiti: Options for Improving Human Rights and Security

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Zoom

Statement of Véline Élysée Charlier
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Members of the Commission, and all distinguished participants,

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak today. My name is Véline Charlier. I am a member of Nou Pap Dòmi, a Haitian civil society organization that stands against corruption and impunity, and that fights for human dignity, justice, and democratic accountability. I am here today to speak on behalf of many Haitians whose voices have been silenced—people who are living in fear, who have lost loved ones, and who no longer have a safe place to call home.

Let us not mince words: Haiti is not in crisis; Haiti is at war and in a state of violent disintegration.

- Entire districts of Port-au-Prince, the Artibonite and more recently the Center regions are under the de facto control of armed gangs, who operate with a level of coordination and ruthlessness very similar to the level of insurgent groups in war zones.
- These groups have shut down the airport, attacked key state institutions, and destroyed police stations. They are using tactics of terrorist groups—burning, raping, looting, and executing civilians to instill fear and displace communities.
- The government is entirely absent, deeply corrupt, and has shown no willingness to address the issues at hand.
- There is no functioning judiciary, no access to basic healthcare, and no rule of law. It is not just a breakdown. It is a deliberate takeover.
- We estimate that 85% of Port-au-Prince, if not more, is now controlled by gangs.

Let that sink in. The capital city of a sovereign nation is not governed by its state—but by terror. This is not a security issue alone. It is a human rights catastrophe.

- More than 4,200 people were killed in 2024 alone, many through gruesome mass executions. Over one million people have been displaced, half of them children, and many of whom now live in informal camps. These figures are not just statistics—they are mothers and fathers, children and elders, erased by bullets, fire, and fear.
- Sexual violence is being weaponized and used to punish women and girls and destroy communities.
- Hospitals, schools, and churches are either shut down or used as gang strongholds.

- The psychological toll is immeasurable—entire generations are growing up knowing only fear and terror.

This situation of chaos and terror that Haiti is currently experiencing is not happening in a vacuum.

The criminal and terrorist groups are not operating in silo. There's an entire ecosystem behind them.

- They are armed with U.S.- made weapons and ammunition, channeled through American ports, the Dominican Republic borders and other places in the region.
- They are financed by transnational criminal networks, including some based in the United States and the Dominican Republic.
- They are sponsored and supported by corrupt Haitian elites—businessmen, politicians, and even religious figures—who benefit from the instability and the black-market economy it sustains.

Therefore, this issue is not solely a Haitian issue — it's a transnational issue that requires urgent, coordinated international action. This violence and insecurity ravaging Haiti today are not just the result of local dynamics; they are fueled by a global system of corruption, illicit trafficking, and decades of foreign policies that have empowered Haitian corrupt elites, while sidelining the voices of everyday Haitians.

That's why I'm here today — to call on the international community to stand with Haiti in this fight in a meaningful and sustained way. We need a response grounded not in charity or short-term optics, but in justice and accountability, in long-term solidarity and shared responsibility. With this in mind, I am presenting a set of actions the international community can collaborate with Haitians to make a real impact.

Recommendation 1: Curbing the Trafficking of Firearms and Ammunition into Haiti

First and foremost, the international community, and the United States in particular, must take concrete steps to curb the trafficking of guns and ammunition into Haiti. This issue should be a regional priority, as illegal arms trafficking is one of the greatest threats to stability in our hemisphere. Despite more than five years of violence in Haiti, little to no action has been taken to address this critical issue. Experts estimate that between 270,000 and 500,000 firearms are circulating illegally in the country. Until this problem is addressed, no amount of force will be enough to combat the gangs. The Haitian police, for example, are completely outgunned by the advanced technology and weapons of these criminal groups, as we see in Haiti today.

Recommendation 2: Assist Haitian Judiciary in Investigating and Prosecuting Individuals Colluding with Gangs and Criminal Networks

It's a fact that the Haitian judiciary is nearly non-existent, and widespread corruption makes it almost impossible to prosecute cases effectively. Given that this is a transnational issue, the international community has the leverage to help Haiti investigate and dismantle the gang ecosystem, targeting those responsible for the violence both within Haiti and abroad.

To address this, the following measures are crucial:

- **Establish a transitional justice body, involving both Haitian and international institutions**, to investigate and prosecute high-level crimes like massacres, financial crimes, and drug trafficking. The UN-backed Anti-Corruption Commission (CICIG), implemented in Guatemala, provides a potential model for such an initiative.
- **Strengthen the use of sanctions, such as the Magnitsky Act and UN sanctions, to target individuals colluding with gangs and committing financial crimes.** While Haitian civil society has welcomed the various sanctions the international community has imposed on individuals in Haiti, the impact has been limited due to the fact that they have not been followed by adequate judicial processes, which are crucial for ensuring true accountability and justice. Without these processes, these individuals continue to cause harm without facing real consequences.

Recommendation 3. Prioritizing Support for the Haitian National Police

It is crucial to review the current security support approach and redirect resources towards strengthening the Haitian forces, particularly the Haitian National Police and the Army. Currently, the international community has focused its resources primarily on supporting the Multinational Security Support Mission (MSS) led by Kenya. However, after nearly a year of operations, the MSS has failed to meet its objectives. Meanwhile, the Haitian National Police and the Army, despite their courage, continue to struggle with limited resources in its anti-gang efforts.

The current approach must be reassessed, and the priority should shift toward providing sustainable and comprehensive support to the Haitian police. This support can take several forms, ensuring that their capabilities are strengthened for long-term impact, including:

- Support the Haitian Police in a thorough vetting process.
- Provide the Haitian police with the necessary materials, equipment, and technology to counter the gangs.
- Strengthen intelligence-sharing mechanisms between the Haitian police and international partners to provide actionable insights into gang operations.
- Provide tactical support for high-value target operations aimed at dismantling gang leadership.

Recommendation 4.: Provide Governance Support for Elections

Given the current crisis in Haiti, organizing elections in the immediate future is not feasible, and rushing elections could deepen the instability rather than resolve it. However, it is critical for the international community to assist the Haitian government and civil society in laying the groundwork for future elections. This support should focus on strengthening the electoral infrastructure to ensure that, when the situation allows, elections can be held in a fair, transparent, and inclusive manner.

Conclusion

I stress these recommendations because much of the needed support hinges on international cooperation. The actions that I have outlined are not about shifting the entire burden of solving

Haiti's crisis onto the international community. Rather, these are concrete steps the international community can take to support Haiti's recovery, alongside Haitian actors. As I stated in the beginning of my remarks, this crisis is not only a Haitian issue; it is a regional issue with far-reaching implications. Therefore, a coordinated, multilateral approach is essential to help Haiti restore order, build the infrastructure for democratic governance, and ensure a lasting stability for the future.