

Haiti: It's time to strengthen homegrown solutions

Recommendations

Peace

- The transitional presidential council should **invest urgently in an inclusive peace process and national dialogue** in which Haitian civil society, especially women and young people have a leading role.
- The U.S should scale up efforts to **end arms being trafficked** from the U.S to Haiti. Illegal firearms entering Haiti are understood to originate in the U.S¹, even though on occasion they are trafficked through a third country.

Crisis Response

- **Scale up and transform humanitarian funding:** International donors should scale up funding that is flexible, long term and supports nexus approaches. In the last 6 years, only 34 per cent of the UN's humanitarian response plan was funded².
- INGOs, international donors and the UN should **support the leadership of local communities and civil society in the design and delivery** of relief, in line with localisation commitments such as the Grand Bargain³, Charter4change⁴ and Pledge for change⁵.
- All stakeholders, including the armed groups should work together to **enable humanitarian access**. The humanitarian corridors that are in place currently are mainly focused on supporting the evacuation of foreign nationals. These should be broadened to allow the safe movement of humanitarian responders.

Economic and environmental justice

- France, the U.S and other public and private creditors that profited from **historic debts** that were enforced on Haiti should respond to Haiti's calls to address this, rooted in **reparative justice**. The legacy of the unjust settlement with France, and more recent debts have made it very hard for Haiti to invest in its own economy.
- Haitian authorities should develop **effective and fair macroeconomic policies that serve and are shaped by marginalised communities**. ECLAC⁶ and UNCTAD⁷ could be important allies in this regard, especially given the negative impact that trade liberalisation policies have had that were forced on Haiti by undemocratic international financial institutions, which failed to foster broad-based economic development.
- **Pledged climate funds should be provided in the form of grants, not loans**. Given its vulnerability to climate change and wider environmental impacts and its status as a low-income country, countries that have pledged climate finance and loss and damage funds should ensure that Haiti receives its fair share of these pledges through grants, not loans.

Overview

The humanitarian, security and governance crisis in Haiti has intensified in recent weeks. **Armed groups have taken over most of Port-au-Prince, the capital and are carrying out violent attacks and killings with impunity.**

They had called for the prime minister Ariel Henry to resign. Henry announced on 11 March that he promises to resign when a transitional council is in place. Meanwhile, the violence and instability have not stopped. Whilst politicians and foreign leaders attempt to forge a political path out of the crisis, Haitians are experiencing a near total absence of public services, as violence spreads in the absence of an effective government.

Since 2018, **political instability** has led to increased insecurity and violence across the country. The assassination of the former president in 2021 by local and foreign mercenary groups had exacerbated the situation. Over 362,551 people are estimated to be **internally displaced** primarily due to the insecurity arising from the gang violence⁷.

According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), "Virtually every metric of insecurity, from homicide, sexual violence and kidnapping to the killing of police and migration out of the country – is trending upward"⁸.

Violent protests and roadblocks have repeatedly led to the damage of communication infrastructure and the scarcity of fuel.

Looting has led to the closure of the main seaport of Port-au-Prince where Caribbean Port Services has halted its operations. **Haiti relies heavily on imported goods and the shortage of essential products is expected to spark further violence.**

The UN resolution adopted in October 2023 for the deployment of an international security force in Haiti raised scepticism among Haitians due to

the legacy of unresolved historical abuse left by the UN Stabilisation Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH)⁹ as well as the failures of other past foreign security and aid interventions in Haiti.

The international community has often focused on addressing the symptoms of crises and have not adequately listened to local civil society or addressed the root causes.

At the time of writing, Haitian authorities have sent draft plans to CARICOM, the regional body to establish a nine-member council comprised of political parties, civil society and the private sector that will lead Haiti in the run up to presidential elections planned for early 2026. These plans are awaiting the approval of Henry's government.

Civil society response

Behind the worrying headlines, local communities have been working tirelessly to support each other. Civil society organisations, including those working with **Christian Aid and ACT Alliance** are also playing a critical role in the absence of government, security and public services.



"In some places, we are seeing food prices go up by more than 20%. In the supermarkets, the shelves are practically empty. I believe that everyone must contribute to addressing this crisis."

*Aldrin Calixte, Executive Secretary, Haiti Survie.
Credit: Jimmy Marcel*

Christian Aid/ACT and our partners have worked in Haiti since the 1980s to address climate change, economic justice, gender justice and humanitarian issues. Our partners in Haiti are currently continuing their vital work within communities despite the security challenges.

Due to the unstable situation, we are adapting the way we support partners and have put in place safety measures. Where possible, support and evaluations are carried out remotely.

Haiti Survie, a local organisation that we partner with, is responding to the needs of internally displaced persons (IDPs) who have fled Port-au-Prince to camps located in government buildings in the outskirts. They are working in collaboration with the FAES (Fond d'Assistance Economique et Sociale), a government department and with the Directorate of Civil Protection. They are also coordinating with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to provide multipurpose cash transfers through mobile money.



“As a teacher, the instability and violence have greatly affected my work. One week you can go to school, but for the rest of the month, with the violence on the streets, you can’t carry on...In the past we could have two meals a day, but now, we barely manage to eat once a day which just goes to show how hard things are”.

Desamour Linda. Credit: Erius Moise, Haiti Survie

SCH (Service Chétien d’Haïti), another local organisation we work with, is currently responding to the violent crisis in the Croix-des-Bouquets area, located 12.9 km northeast of Port-au-Prince to support IDPs who have fled the city centre to this location.

With funding from START Fund, Christian Aid and our local partner **Konbit pou Ranfose Aksyon Lakay (KORAL)** are supporting 1,000 families who recently fled the capital to seek safety in Les Cayes in southern Haiti.

The 1,000 newly arrived families will receive the equivalent of around \$160 in cash in the local currency. In addition, 4,000 people will also receive hygiene kits. KORAL will also carry out awareness raising sessions about the steps people can take to prevent cholera and other water borne diseases from spreading.

To help those who have fled gang violence to try cope with the trauma they have experienced, KORAL will work closely with local professionals to deliver much-needed psychosocial support and trauma counselling services for 2,500 people, with a focus on women and girls. KORAL is also carrying out awareness raising sessions on gender-based violence and the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse.

We are also working to **strengthen Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) systems in coordination with the Directorate of Civil Protection**. This involves providing training on disaster risk reduction (DRR) to local civil protection groups and schoolchildren at the community level, identifying and reducing community disaster risks, developing local contingency and evacuation plans, and providing materials and equipment for community first response in the event of a disaster.

Beyond the security situation, civil society organisations have also had to deal with staff shortages with many choosing to flee the country in search of safety and security.

The approach we and our local partners take is the survivor and community led response¹⁰ (sclr)¹¹ approach which promotes **the agency of crisis affected populations to lead humanitarian responses**.

This approach has been used in various crises in Haiti ranging from responding to the needs of the people affected by the 2021 earthquake, forced returnees from the Dominican Republic and internally displaced people fleeing the ongoing violence in the Port-au-Prince metropolitan area.

Evaluations of recent large scale humanitarian responses by the international community in the country have revealed that they have tended to be **externally led and top-down, with limited accountability to affected populations**¹² (OECD 2017; Arroy 2014; Piquet 2013).

Local civil society and self-help groups played a key role during the 2010 and 2021 earthquake response, navigating security challenges, providing relief, psychosocial support and hope (CA, 2022). In the current crises, they are again actively responding, at great risk to their own lives.

Unjust foreign interventions

Haiti has had a turbulent history of foreign interventions that have influenced its current socio-economic climate. France threatened to attack Haiti, after Haiti secured freedom from French colonialism and forced it to pay **decades of debt**¹³.

The World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) put pressure on Haiti in the late '90s to liberalise its trade and made aid conditional on such policies. This stifled domestic production as imports were cheaper (Christian Aid, McGuigan, 2006)¹⁴. The agriculture sector was especially impacted, and many farmers lost their employment.

Although Haiti received some debt relief after the 2010 earthquake, public debt has increased in recent years and in September 2022, it was estimated to be 23.3 per cent of its GDP¹⁵.

Although France had previously cancelled a \$77 million loan¹⁶, it hasn't responded to Haitian civil society's reparations movements to address the decades of "independence debt" that Haiti was forced to pay France.

Haiti's risk of external debt distress is high and in 2023, the Haitian government turned to facilities like the Rapid Credit Facility¹⁷ for help.

With a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita of around US\$2000-3000¹⁸ and a Human Development Index (HDI) ranking of 158 out of 191¹⁹, Haiti is categorised by the UN as one of the world's 'Least Developed Countries' (LDCs)²⁰.

A dialogue on **equitable debt restructuring** is essential to break cycles of debt and free up resources to enable the government of Haiti to fulfil their human rights obligations and invest in poverty reduction and access to basic resources for all.

Many Haitians have fled to neighbouring countries but regional support to Haitians has been limited. As safe routes to enter neighbouring nations are few, **human trafficking and forced returns** have been on the rise. Illicit cross-border movements of guns and drugs have also fuelled underlying challenges.

In October 2023, the UN Security Council approved the deployment of a **Multinational Security Support mission**, or MSS in Haiti²¹. Haitian civil society insist that this solution shouldn't be imposed on them but that rather a credible, broad-based transitional government should be given the mandate to decide how the international community can best support its security needs.

Haitians' concern that an international force like the MSS could be counterproductive and even

escalate violence are rooted in the history of US military interventions, and the UN stabilisation mission (MINUSTAH) deployed between 2004 and 2017, which left a legacy of allegations of sexual abuse, exploitation, and violence, and an outbreak of cholera that claimed the lives of nearly 10,000 Haitians.

From the perspective of most Haitians, the problem lies in the failure of national governance systems that were not accountable to citizens and international interventions that also hinder the agency and leadership of local communities and local civil society.

Conclusion

The latest political crisis is a renewed attack on the resilience of Haitians and on governance structures which have been consistently eroded by cyclical crises.

While many refer to Haiti as a "failed state," most Haitians see it as the **failure of centuries of policies imposed on Haiti by the international community**, including tax, trade and aid policies that prioritised foreign interests and short-term gains over sustainable democracy and prosperity for Haitians.

The 2010 earthquake was seen by many as an opportunity to rebuild Haiti with strong public institutions. However, despite hundreds of millions of dollars being poured into the country, much of it was focused only on addressing urgent needs and not structural issues.

We stand in unity with Haitians who are denouncing the violence employed by armed gangs, the disinformation being spread on social media and are calling for transparency in political negotiations²² and unhindered humanitarian access²³.

The country needs an urgent and inclusive political solution to the myriad challenges it faces, and progress can only be achieved if home grown

solutions that are shaped by the communities that are most affected are heeded to.

End notes

- ¹ Haiti's criminal markets: Mapping Trends in Firearms and Drug Trafficking, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2023, p2, [Haiti_assessment_UNODC.pdf](#)
- ² OCHA Haiti Humanitarian Highlights, January 2024
- ³ Grand Bargain Localisation Workstream ([ifrc.org](#))
- ⁴ Commitments – ([charter4change.org](#))
- ⁵ Pledge for Change, ([pledgeforchange2030.org](#))
- ⁶ Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean ([cepal.org](#))
- ⁷ United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
- ⁸ Internal displacement situation in Haiti, IOM, March 2024, Haiti — Internal displacement situation in Haiti — West, South, South-East, Artibonite, Grande Anse, Centre and Nippes (March 2024) | Displacement Tracking Matrix ([iom.int](#))
- ⁹ [As the UN leaves Haiti, its victims still wait for justice](#), United Nations, Al Jazeera, 2019
- ¹⁰ A Review sclr in Haiti, 2022, <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/resources/our-work/review-survivor-and-community-led-response-sclr-haiti>
- ¹¹ 'sclr' is written in small letters on purpose to emphasise that the approach is not a blueprint but needs to be contextualised.
- ¹² Manilla Arroyo, D. (2014). Blurred lines: accountability and responsibility in post-earthquake Haiti. *Medicine, Conflict and Survival*, 30(2), 110–132. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13623699.2014.904642>
- ¹³ Haiti's Lost Billions - The New York Times, 2022
- ¹⁴ Agricultural liberalisation in Haiti, McGuigan, 2006, <https://www-staging.christianaid.ie/sites/default/files/2017-08/agricultural-liberalisation-haiti-january-2006.pdf>
- ¹⁵ Haiti: Request for Disbursement Under the Rapid Credit Facility—Debt Sustainability Analysis in: IMF Staff Country Reports Volume 2023 Issue 080, 2023
- ¹⁶ [French president makes unprecedented state visit to Haiti](#), AP News, 2015
- ¹⁷ Haiti: Request for Disbursement Under the Rapid Credit Facility—Debt Sustainability Analysis in: IMF Staff Country Reports Volume 2023 Issue 080 (2023)
- ¹⁸ World Bank estimate of Haiti GDP per capita in 2022 was \$3,300: GDP per capita, PPP (current international \$) - Haiti | Data ([worldbank.org](#)) and IMF estimate for 2024 is around \$2,300: IMF data mapper
- ¹⁹ UNDP Human Development Index: Country Insights | Human Development Reports ([undp.org](#))
- ²⁰ Least Developed Countries (LDCs) | Department of Economic and Social Affairs
- ²¹ UN approves international force to aid Haiti amid gang violence | Crime News | Al Jazeera
- ²² <https://www.change.org/p/deklarasyon-yon-gwoup-sitwayen-ak-sitway%C3%A8n-ayisyen-sou-sa-k-ap-pase-nan-peyi-a-eb944dfa-8510-48f0-9f2f-c4460cc98348>
- ²³ [Statement-of-the-Cadre-de-Liaison-Inter-Organisation-CLIO-on-the-humanitarian-crisis-in-Haiti-March-24-.pdf](#) ([cliohaiti.net](#))

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