

Violence and Conflict in Haiti

Haiti is currently in a situation of violence that deepens daily. It is a very worrisome situation, that has its seeds in the distant past with leaders without concrete vision to advance Haiti's democratization process. A brief historical analysis of the country helps for understanding better the current situation.

The oppression that accompanied the colonization of Santo Domingo, the pillage and exploitation of the resources by the colonial forces, and the violence of the slave system had as a direct consequence the slave revolt that created Haiti's independence on January 1, 1804. Contrary to Gramsci's theory, the violence used during independence stayed with the new free people and manifested itself through massacres of the settlers.

The hatred became structural and characterized the first 2 centuries of Haitian history. In fact, Haiti's first head of State was a military commander that before independence ruled the country through a dictatorship. After that, the majority of the country's heads of State achieved power through violence (coup d'états, civil war, revolts, etc.). To this tradition of violence it is important to add the USA occupations of 1915 and 1994 which are directly linked to the United States plans for colonization and expansionism done through the 30 years dictatorship of Duvaliers (1957 – 1986) and the 3 years of coup d'état (1991 – 1994). The direct result is that all political movements in Haiti typically adopt violence and its tools: small arms, hand-made bombs, Molotov cocktails, assassinations, etc.

In 1990, the people, in its majority, trusted Jean Bertrand Aristide to bring the country under the reign of democracy. During his term, there was a coup d'état that lasted 3 years. People resisted the coup d'état and Aristide returned, which proved even worse. Upon his return, the Aristide government created a crisis never before seen in Haiti. Aristide armed his partisans that have life and death decisions over any who question the arbitrary decisions taken by the Lavalas government. These supporters have nearly total impunity. For example, on January 13, 2004, they openly did acts of sabotage at the restaurant where several radio announcers seen as troublemakers by the government were gathering. No investigation was done despite requests from the opposition and civil society. All public manifestations against the government are systematically repressed and President Aristide has never condemned the violence. The hailing of political assassinations forced the opposition and large sectors of the civil society to demand that Aristide be replaced immediately by a Government of consensus. The need for Aristide's departure is reinforced by the steep rise in the cost of basic products, the deterioration of living conditions, the assassinations of students at the State University of Haiti, the political polarization, the political assassinations including one of Aristide's supporters, Amiot Métayer. (The Organization of the American States in its resolution 806 and 822 has demanded the immediate arrest of Métayer and others). Most of Haitian civil society has demand his immediate resignation, except Aristide's supporters that continue to defend his continuation as President.

To give an example of the complicated nature of the situation, the supporters of Aristide's government in Gonaïve (4th largest city in the North of Haiti) who have been armed to violently handled the opposition are became the most radical in opposition of the

government since the assassination of their leader Amiot Métayer. Since September, 2003 there have been daily violent manifestations in Gonaive. The schools, commerce, and the public administration are not working since then. Many civilians and police personnel have died. Many were forced to relocate, especially those living in the poor neighborhood of Raboteau, not to become the next victim. In early February 2003, the city of Gonaive was taken over by opposition forces, at heavy cost in lives. Shortly thereafter, other cities were taken over, and dozens have died.

The anti-government demonstrations are increasing across the country, especially after the government supporters invaded the Social Science College and the National Institute for Management and International Studies (INAGHAI) on December 5, 2003 with the compliance of the Haitian National Police (PNH). They destroyed all the computers and walls at the Social Science College and injured many students. Even the Rector and vice-Rector were not spared despite their attempt to mediate. The government supporters broke both of the Rector's legs with iron bars while the police stood by and did not intervene; only later condemning the attack. The police opened an inquiry, but it is only a procedure as the inquiry is closed before it even gets started. It is pure demagoguery to have a language of peace and at the same time not take any actions to stop violent behavior, something that needs to be addressed at the deepest levels.

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