

Intervention Monday, April 22, 2024 by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Haiti Maria Isabel Salvador, at the session of the Security Council from Port-au-Prince by videoconference.

Briefing to Security Council by Ms. María Isabel Salvador, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Haiti and Head of BINUH - 22 April 2024

Madam President, Distinguished Members of the Council, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

One year ago, almost to the day, I briefed this Council for the first time as Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Haiti and Head of BINUH. At that time and in briefings since, I have been speaking about the multiple protracted crises affecting Haiti and pleading for the urgent need for action.

Since April of 2023, I have consistently called attention to the inexorable requirement to restore security conditions conducive to the holding of elections in Haiti, but also to safety and dignity for the Haitian people. I welcomed this Council's authorization of the deployment of the Multinational Security Support mission, the MSS, last October, in response to Haiti's appeal, one year before that, to the international community.

Today, it pains me to note that all speeches and callings had not avoided that some of the worst scenarios for Haiti have become realities in recent months and weeks. During the two private sessions you convened, on 6 March and 18 March, I provided a detailed account of the dramatic and unprecedented, never-ending, spiral of violence in the country. It is impossible to overstate the increase in gang activity across Port-au-Prince and beyond, the deterioration of the human rights situation and the deepening of the humanitarian crisis. Meanwhile, only a small percentage, 8.1 per cent, of the 674-million dollar 2024 Humanitarian Response Plan for Haiti has been funded.

In early March gangs mounted coordinated attacks targeting key state infrastructure, including multiple police stations and two of the main prisons in Port-au-Prince, as well as educational and health facilities, and religious sites. Just last week the Medical School of the Université d'Haiti was attacked and looted. Gangs have been constantly launching attacks against the Presidential Palace, which resulted in fierce confrontations with the Haitian National Police leading to multiple casualties. Since 3 March, gang confrontations around the international airport in Port-au-Prince forced all commercial airlines to halt services, a situation that continues to this day. Nevertheless, with the support and control of HNP and the Armed Forces of Haiti, works to secure the perimeter around the airport are underway, and some airlines have timidly announced they will restart flights by next month, which will allow economy to reactivate and every Haitian individual to freely move.

During the first quarter of the year around 2,500 persons were killed or injured as a result of gang violence. This is a 53 percent increase as compared to the previous reporting period, making the first quarter of 2024 the most violent since BINUH's Human Rights Section started

recording statistics in January 2022. Violent clashes between the two main gang coalitions have resulted in mass killings of the local population and looting and burning of houses. Gangs have systematically targeted state infrastructure and attacked those performing key roles in governance, including judges and police officers, as well as human rights defenders and journalists. These attacks have further weakened state institutions and deepened the already critical challenges to the re-establishment of rule of law.

The impact of gang violence on the rights of children remains of particular concern. Gang activity has severely limited access to essential services, including healthcare and education, and has exacerbated food insecurity. Further, pushed by the lack of socio-economic opportunities, an alarming number of children have been recruited into the ranks of gangs where, not only are they exposed to being killed or seriously injured during clashes with other gangs or with the police, but they also commit acts of violence, including killings, kidnappings, and rape. Women and young girls continue to be victims of sexual violence, including collective rape, by heavily armed gang members.

In this context of extreme insecurity, the Haitian National Police, assisted by the modest Armed Forces of Haiti and advised by BINUH as well as other international partners has deployed immense efforts to contain the spiral of violence in the country while being targeted by armed gangs, with some successful operations. Nevertheless, the severity of the current crisis underscores the gaps in capacity within the national structures and the urgent need for international assistance, namely through the immediate deployment of the MSS.

Madam President,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The dramatic increase in violence in Port-au-Prince forced the United Nations, some embassies and international organizations to adjust our footprints in Port-au-Prince.

Amid this staggering situation, however, Haitian stakeholders have been working on putting differences aside towards a common path for the restoration of democratic institutions. A first important step was the commitment made at the meeting facilitated by CARICOM on 11 March for the establishment of a Transitional Presidential Council, also known as TPC, designed to pave the way towards democratic stability. Its priorities should include an action plan for near-term security, including through sustained cooperation with the international community for the prompt deployment of the MSS, and the organization of credible, participatory and inclusive elections. Needless to say that high attention must also be paid to the thousands of displaced people, including women and children, victims of gang violence, requiring humanitarian support.

I recognize Prime Minister Ariel Henry's commitment last March to resigning immediately after the installation of the TPC facilitating thus the appointment of a new interim prime minister and government. The outgoing administration's intention to manage ongoing affairs until a new interim prime minister and government are in place avoids a dangerous vacuum and will ensure a seamless transfer of power to the new transitional government.

Since the 11 March announcement, a month-long consultation process among stakeholders led finally to the designation of seven voting members and two observers to the TPC. The Presidential Council members represent nine groups of a broad range of political actors, the business sector and civil society. However it lacked in participation of women's and youth organizations. There is only one woman member. The TPC's non-renewable mandate runs upto 7 February 2026 by which date a new president is to be inaugurated and all elected authorities to be sworn in. Alongside the TPC, a number of other bodies are expected to be created, including a National Security Council and a Provisional Electoral Council which is urgently required to set plans in motion for the organization of elections. I encourage stakeholders to continue to work and maintain the same spirit of collaboration and compromise, by setting aside differences in the sole interest of Haiti and its people, as well as to facilitate processes where women, youth and minority groups have their rightful participation in all decision making bodies that will define the future of Haiti for years to come

Madam President,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I welcome the publication on 12 and 16 April of Executive decrees establishing the TPC and appointing its members. I urge all Haitian stakeholders to put in place the envisaged transitional governance arrangements as swiftly as possible, especially the appointment of an interim Prime Minister and government, and the prompt nomination of the Provisional Electoral Council.

Despite this recent positive developments on the political front, a much-improved security situation remains a condition sine qua non for further progress. Gang leaders and other spoilers have stated their intention to violently disrupt the current political process and I cannot stress enough the need to assist Haiti with its efforts to reestablish security. One and a half years since Haiti requested assistance to enhance security and more than six months since this Council authorized the deployment of the MSS we must continue to stress the importance of its urgent deployment. The sanctions regime is also an effective tool to discourage destabilization attempts by spoilers and criminals, towards transparent political and democratic advancement.

I mentioned at the start of my remarks that only a small percentage of the 674-million USD humanitarian response plan is funded, yet the humanitarian situation continues to spiral in an unprecedented downward trend. Since the start of the latest round of violence, the number of people in need has continued to grow exponentially. Since 8 March, close to 100,000 Haitians have left Port au Prince for the regions, escaping gang violence in search of security. Food insecurity also remains rampant across the country, with half of the population suffering from severe food insecurity. The multiple protracted crises (political, security, humanitarian) that Haiti continues to face must be worked out together. The international community has a role to play in support. But it will only be through an inclusive, participatory, credible and transparent process that leads the Haitian people to a renewed democratically elected governance, that sustainable development will become a real possibility for the people of Haiti.

Madam President,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to emphasize the commitment of the United Nations in Haiti, and of its personnel to continue delivering on its mandate and supporting Haitian stakeholders as they strive to enable a secure environment and restored democratic institutions. BINUH, always within its mandate, continues to be engaged with stakeholders. The CARICOM facilitated process created opportunities for a new transitional governance arrangement that should permit a truly Haitian-led, Haitian-owned political process that leads to the organization of inclusive, participatory and credible elections. I urge once again, Haitian stakeholders to put their differences aside and deliver for the people of Haiti through the implementation of a sustainable, time-bound and commonly accepted roadmap.

I encourage the international community to continue to stand in solidarity with the people of Haiti. In this sense, and at this very critical and unique juncture for Haiti, I urge all Member States to continue funding the Humanitarian Response Plan; and with no further delay to firm up pledges for the deployment of the Multinational Security Support mission to Haiti.

Thank you very much.