

Statement of Special Representative Helen La Lime, Security Council Session on the United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH)

Mr. President, distinguished members of the Council,

1. I am honored to once again have the opportunity to address you in person and provide an update on the situation in Haiti, where conditions have deteriorated in the lead up to the electoral events slated for the fall. In recent weeks, the country has experienced a resurgence in COVID-19 cases which has prompted authorities to declare a new state of health emergency and consequently led the Provisional Electoral Council to postpone the proposed constitutional referendum scheduled to take place at the end of this month. A resurgence in inter-gang violence has caused the displacement of hundreds of families in several poor neighborhoods of Port-au-Prince and has deepened the sentiment of insecurity which pervades Haitian society. Finally, in spite of several Haitian-led mediation efforts, the deep-rooted political crisis which has gripped the country for the better part of the last four years shows no sign of abating. A political agreement remains elusive, as the rhetoric used by some political leaders grows increasingly acrimonious.

2. Even though national authorities have sought to widen consultations on the new draft constitution, the process continues to elicit criticism from various stakeholders due to its perceived lack of inclusivity and transparency. Technical preparations for the referendum have also been plagued by critical operational delays. Moreover, the ever-growing polarization of Haitian politics, as evidenced by some actors recently exhorting the population to resort to violence to disrupt the referendum process, is extremely concerning. All stakeholders must refrain from such inflammatory discourse. All forms of violence or incitement to violence are unacceptable and must be strongly condemned.

3. As Haiti prepares to enter a new electoral cycle, an inclusive and participatory process will be essential to consolidate the path towards good governance and political stability in the country. In this regard, the debate over the constitutional referendum should not detract from the timely organization and holding of the overdue parliamentary and local polls, as well as that of the presidential election. A political consensus remains the best possible means to holding a peaceful process that will allow the Haitian people to fully exercise their right to vote. It is of paramount importance that all political and civil society leaders enter into a good-faith dialogue to constructively devise a way to ensure that elections take place within this calendar year, so that an orderly democratic transfer of power to the duly elected representatives of the Haitian people occurs in February 2022.

Distinguished members of the Council,

4. These last months have been marked by several worrying incidents and serious human rights abuses perpetrated by gangs against civilian populations. Between 1 February and 31 May, these criminal groups were responsible for 78 homicides and countless assaults and rapes. In addition, repeated episodes of gang violence have resulted in the displacement of over sixteen thousand people from the Port-au-Prince metropolitan area neighborhoods of Bas-Delmas, Bel-Air, Martissant, Tabarre-Issa, and Toussaint Brave since the beginning of the year. It is the duty of Haitian authorities to end the violence, protect the population, ensure unfettered humanitarian access to those in need, provide emergency assistance to those who have been displaced, and hold the perpetrators of such acts accountable for their crimes.

5. While the strength of the Haitian National Police is still not commensurate with the size of the country's population, the chronic state of insecurity starkly underscores the limits of a law enforcement-centered approach to the gang issue. A more comprehensive strategy to address its underlying causes is urgently needed. I am pleased to note that the inter-ministerial task force on Community Violence Reduction established by the Government in early April completed – with BINUH support – its review of the national strategy, a document which aims to inform an integrated response to gang violence and is now ready for approval. Likewise, the Executive has made noticeable headway in revising and bolstering weapons and ammunitions management legislation which, when adopted, will help regulate the import, purchase, and use of firearms in the country.

6. Incremental progress has also occurred in the judicial realm, with the installment on 5 May of the National Legal Aid Council Board as well as the opening in early June of legal aid offices in the jurisdictions of Les Cayes and Petit-Goave. These encouraging, albeit long overdue, steps will contribute to enhancing access to justice for the least privileged and signal the start of a systemic push to reduce prolonged pre-trial detention and overcrowding in Haitian prisons. The new penal code and code of criminal procedure will also be instrumental in this effort. To facilitate their dissemination among judicial actors, and their entry into force in June 2022, strong political commitment, notably through the immediate establishment of a National Committee for Penal Reform, will be critical.

7. By contrast, efforts to fight impunity remain woefully inadequate as evidenced by the lack of progress in the Dorval case. A chronic lack of resources dedicated to judicial inquiries and lengthy delays in renewing the mandates of investigative judges also stymie progress in investigating and prosecuting such emblematic cases as the 2018 La Saline massacre or the 2019 Bel-Air killings. It would behoove authorities to provide judicial actors with the means they require to

accomplish their mission.

Mr. President,

8. In spite of the complexity of the situation, the United Nations team in Haiti continues to work hand in hand to help authorities address immediate challenges as well as the structural causes of instability that impede progress, while seeking to enhance the impact of our collective interventions. To that end, a number of joint initiatives are underway to implement the national social protection policy; reinforce food security and community resilience; catalyze the fight against impunity and corruption; and operationalize the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. I would appeal here to Member States to contribute to the 2021-2022 Humanitarian Response Plan, which still requires some US\$ 198 million to enable humanitarian actors to respond to the needs of 1.5 million people, 1.3 million of whom are severely food insecure.

Distinguished members of the Council,

9. To ensure that the opportunity of a democratic renewal of Haitian institutions is seized; that the right of every Haitian to live in a peaceful and stable environment is upheld; that each and every citizen of the country has access to justice, social services, and the opportunity of a livelihood, it is imperative that local, parliamentary, as well as presidential elections take place, as scheduled, in the fall of this year. To that end, all Haitian stakeholders must urgently set aside their differences, eschew their narrow interests, and work together to tackle the protracted political, structural, and social issues that hinder the country's progress.

Thank you.