



November 22, 2022

The President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Re: Support for Haiti

Dear Mr. President,

The Jesuits of the United States are deeply troubled by the situation in Haiti which has taken on unprecedented dimensions. What is needed at this time is not another foreign military intervention, but a Haitian-led solution. We urge you to work with community-based organizations to help Haitians rebuild trustworthy public institutions and a sustainable peace rooted in human rights and self-determination.

Our concerns and call for action are grounded in the experiences and perspectives of our brother Jesuits in Haiti, and of the people they accompany who report constant gang violence, human suffering, an extensive culture of impunity and an absence of legitimate leadership. In a recent message, Fr. Jean-Denis Saint-Félix, the Jesuit superior in Haiti, wrote “in this very moment people are being killed and kidnapped, more and more barrios are fallen into the gangs’ hands. Every hour is a tragedy here.”

We affirm the skepticism voiced by them and others as they call for a comprehensive international response. Decades of heavy-handed financial and political interventions have justifiably left Haitians wary of outside actors. However, as Fr. Jean-Denis Saint-Félix said, “faced with the powerlessness of the State and the weakness of a distraught civil society and given the responsibility of the international community and its involvement in the Haitian crisis, it is becoming more and more obvious to the various sectors of society that a definitive solution necessarily requires the serious and sincere commitment of the international community.”

The involvement of the international community must in all cases respect Haitian national sovereignty. This means acknowledging the ineffectiveness of previous aid, economic pressure and political and military interventions on the island, most of which were driven by outside economic and geopolitical interests. We only need to cite the recent pressure from the International Monetary Fund on the government to cut fuel subsidies, plunging people further into poverty. The development of a new paradigm that promotes credible and honest Haitian actors will be challenging yet necessary for sustained peace.

We ask the United States Government and the international community to take the following steps:

- ***Take immediate emergency measures to support the most vulnerable people.*** Our Christian faith commits us to charity and justice, ensuring daily needs are met while also building more humane and equitable structures. Those who face housing insecurity, hunger, income insecurity, and lack of access to other basic needs should take precedence. Such an effort can and should be done in close collaboration with Haitian-led civil society in a manner that empowers local initiatives and allows them to flourish.

- **Ensure that national institutions such as the Haitian National Police are following the rule of law and serving the interests of the people.** Our brother Jesuits report connections between the gangs, the government, and the business elites, with gang violence being wielded in service of the ruling powers with impunity. The United States has been supporting the Haitian National Police with equipment and training. This same Haitian National Police is largely dysfunctional and is plagued by corruption. The United States and the international community must ensure that any support for the Haitian National Police or other institutions of the State is conditional on following the rule of law, and is used to disarm and neutralize armed gangs, to restore the territorial sovereignty of the state, and to protect the people of Haiti, guaranteeing their constitutional and human rights including the right to legitimate protest. This support should have short-term, mid-term and long-term goals, and should be carried out in ways that do not consolidate the illegitimate power of the current government.
- **End the flow of arms to Haiti.** Most weapons are coming from the US, although gun sales to the country are supposed to be highly regulated. Clearly there are problems with the system. We urge the US government to work with the United Nations to take concrete measures to stop the flow of arms at the source.
- **Continue and broaden sanctions** against those who are financing armed gangs, freeze their assets, refuse visas and impose visa cancellations. Moreover, it is important to note that sanctions from outside empower Haitians at home to speak out in legitimate protest.
- **Support structural reforms in Haiti and a government that can sustain them.** The task at hand is immense, with virtually every sector of the Haitian government and economy needing reform. Previous efforts of the international community in Haiti constitute a cautionary tale; while its involvement in a process of reform is essential, this cannot take place unless its role is consultative, limited, and ultimately subordinate to genuine participation of as many Haitian voices as possible. Critical to this is ongoing dialogue that privileges the role of marginalized and disenfranchised communities.

Our support for international involvement in Haiti recognizes that those responsible for harm bear an obligation to remedy it, but not at the expense of the sovereignty of the Haitian people. The Jesuits oppose military intervention but stand ready to assist legitimate reform efforts that can build lasting peace in Haiti.

Sincerely,



Rev. Jean-Denis Saint-Félix, SJ
Superior
Jesuits in Haiti



Very Rev. Brian Paulson, SJ
President
Jesuit Conference of Canada and the
United States

Cc: Secretary of State Antony Blinken