



JÉSUITES
du Canada

JESUITS
of Canada

November 22, 2022

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau
Prime Minister of Canada
Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0A2

Dear Mr. Prime Minister:

The Jesuits of Canada 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 that they and others voice 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 in further poverty. The development of a new paradigm that promotes credible and honest Haitian actors will be challenging yet necessary for sustained peace.

We note the aid and additional economic sanctions against political elites that the Government of Canada has recently announced. We ask the Government of Canada and the international community to act in the following ways:

- **Ensure that Canadian humanitarian aid goes to support the most vulnerable people in Haiti.** 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. Canada has been supporting the Haitian National Police with equipment and training. This same Haitian National Police

is largely dysfunctional and is plagued by corruption. Canada 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 Canadian government to work with the United Nations and with the US government 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 not only impede the ability of some to act with impunity; they also empower Haitians at home to speak out against irresponsible action 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 community 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 of the Jesuits in
Haiti



Very Rev. Erik Oland, SJ
Provincial Superior
Jesuits of Canada / Jésuites du
Canada