

Violence in Haiti portends worse times ahead



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By Anelí Ruiz García*

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In January alone, 11 to 18 police officers lost their lives, two are unaccounted for and others were injured by gang incursions in the capital and the city of Liancourt in the Artibonite department, according to the institution's director Frantz Elbé.

In Port-au-Prince, three officers were killed in an ambush by criminals on their way to help a relative, while in Liancourt an armed group attacked the police station and killed seven officers.

The naked corpses of the policemen covered by their weapons and the mockery of the gang members went viral on the networks and the massacre provoked violent protests by the union that blocked the main avenues, attacked the residence of Prime Minister Ariel Henry, the airport facilities and even assaulted diplomatic personnel.

"We can't take it anymore, that's not normal, every policeman they kill leaves family. These are people who are sent to do their job without the right tools, we can't allow it," an official told Prensa Latina on condition of anonymity.

At the same time, gangs are breaking into residential neighborhoods, murdering, raping and looting homes, despite the operation launched by the police with the aim of curbing insecurity.

The United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti warned at the end of February about the violence perpetrated by the Baz Gran Grif gang against residents of Artibonite, which up to that date had caused 69 deaths and 83 wounded.

The gangs created a climate of terror, characterized by looting, murders, kidnappings, vandalism, extortion, hijacking of goods trucks and rape of girls and women in the communes of Liancourt, Verrettes, Petite Rivière de l'Artibonite and L'Estère, the organization lamented.

The situation - it indicated - caused thousands of members of the population to take refuge in other communes of the department, while fear of reprisals and lack of medical services aggravate the crisis.

And as if that were not enough, kidnappings have multiplied so far this year, with victims including former ministers, civil servants, health personnel, businessmen, small traders and even students.

"Banditry, trivialization of life and practices of deprivation of liberty are becoming the norm, before the impotent eyes of the corresponding authorities", deplored in a communiqué the rectorate of the State University of Haiti, after the kidnapping of the former head of Education and president of the Haitian Society of History and Geography, Pierre Buteau, who spent nine days with his captors.

Hesitant response from the international community

As the gangs increase their control, laying siege to Port-au-Prince and other cities, the prime minister stepped up his meetings with the international community and reiterated his request to deploy troops to contain the criminal groups.

"I encourage the Celac (Community of Latin American and Caribbean States) countries that can, especially those that already know the terrain, to help us," Henry requested during the summit of the organization based in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

He assured that it is not a matter of repeating the failures of the past and replicating formulas that "consisted of coming to do the work instead of the Haitians". This time, he insisted, we are asking for strong support from sister countries to back up the efforts of local security forces.

Henry reiterated a similar speech at the XLIV conference of heads of government of the Caribbean Community held in the Bahamas and called for security to bring hope to Haiti.

"What we need is more support for the Police. There are things we cannot do because the police have not been trained to handle these types of situations," said the head of government.

So far, the international community is hesitating in the face of Haiti's requests, and while Celac members called for a broader consensus and urged members to study the possibility of a deployment requested by the UN, Caricom, for its part, dissociated itself from sending troops.

The regional bloc's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Amery Browne, considered it premature for foreign soldiers to storm the Caribbean country and insisted that the solution to the crisis must be led by Haiti.

Canada, which still owes the armored vehicles purchased by the Government of Haiti to support the forces of order, sanctioned together with the United States members of the political and economic elite and deployed a surveillance plane and ships on the coasts of Haiti, in addition to leading international meetings, but without announcing other actions.

Meanwhile, a survey by the Diagnostic Development Group revealed that 69 percent of Haitians are in favor of the deployment of an international force and 71 percent believe that the National Police cannot reestablish security in the country.

It is in this context that organizations such as Nou pap Konplis (We will not be accomplices) are calling for concrete actions by the international community in relation to the crisis.

On the occasion of the visit of a Caricom delegation that met with government representatives, social and religious organizations, political leaders and influential figures, the platform warned that international partners must "come to their senses" and act on the urgent problems that are tearing the Haitian nation apart.

Lack of consensus

The international community agrees with the consensus promoted by the Prime Minister which gave birth to the High Transitional Council, but it still needs to be more inclusive and to include the reticent ones, among them important opposition groups and political parties such as Fanmi Lavalas, founded by former President Jean Bertrand Aristide or the signatories of the Montana Accord.

At the end of his visit to Port-au-Prince at the head of the Caricom delegation, the Jamaican Prime Minister, Andrew Holness, suggested that Haiti should have a greater political agreement to which the international community could adhere.

Internally, however, negotiations between the authorities and the opposition have cooled, and for the moment an agreement seems unlikely.

In the meantime, the gangs operate as effective authorities, imposing their law in increasingly vast territories with practically no counterpart, while tens of thousands flee through open escape routes such as the new U.S. migration plan, and others continue to throw themselves into the sea.

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