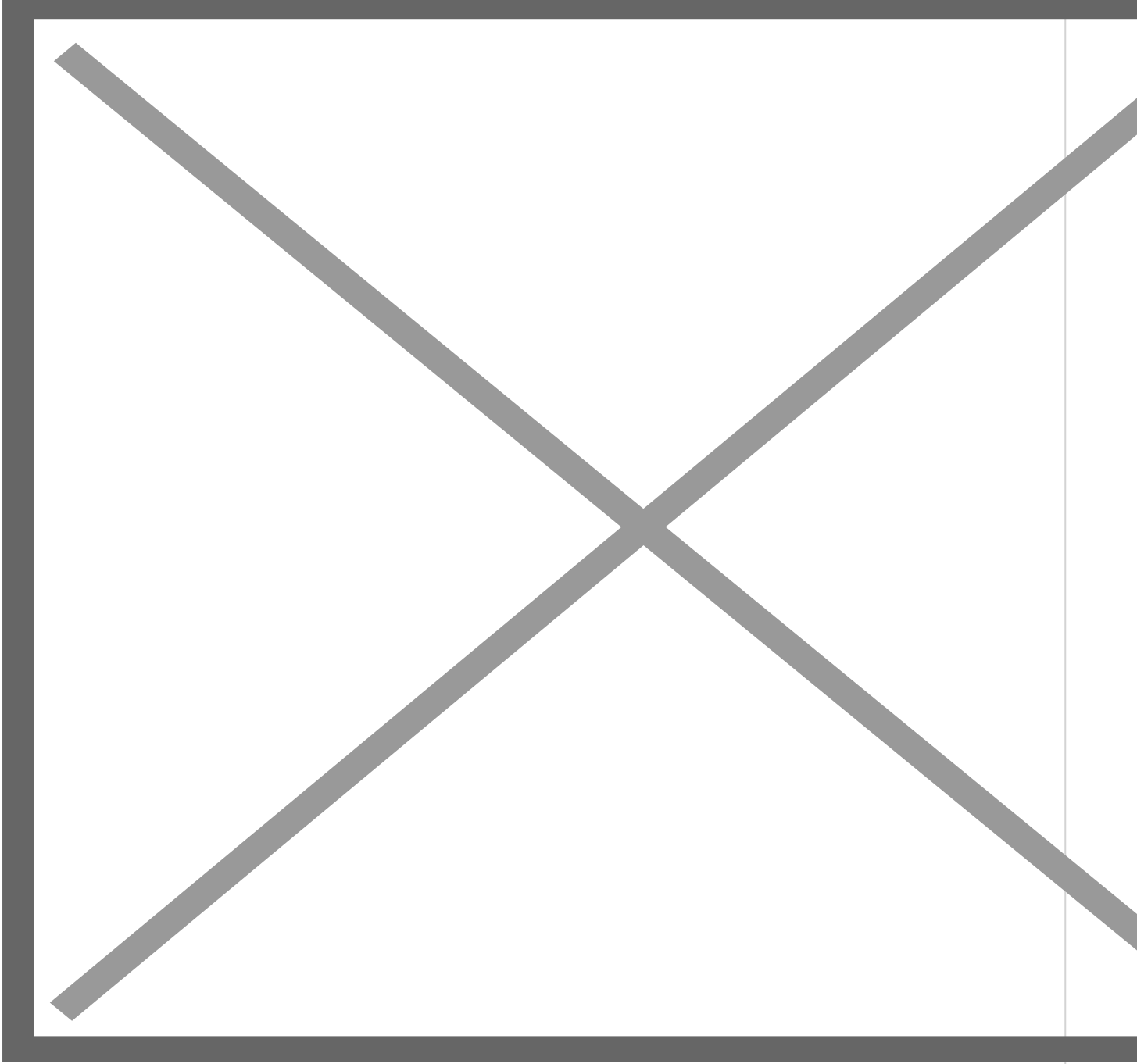


*Wife of assassinated Haitian
president speaks out from
hospital*

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Haiti's first lady, Martine Moïse, arrived in an ambulance plane at Fort Lauderdale Executive Airport, north of Miami, to be treated for the serious injuries she suffered in the attack in which the president was assassinated.

Miami, July 11 (RHC)-- The wife of assassinated Haitian President Jovenel Moïse has spoken for the first time since gunmen stormed the couple's home in Port-au-Prince, saying the attack that killed her husband happened "in the blink of an eye."

In an audio message posted on her official Twitter account on Saturday, Martine Moise called on Haiti not to “lose its way” after the attack that left her critically injured. “I am alive, thanks to God,” Martine Moise said in Creole in the audio message, which Haiti’s minister of culture and communications, Pradel Henriquez, confirmed to the AFP news agency as being authentic.

“I am alive but I have lost my husband Jovenel,” she added. Jovenel Moise, 53, was killed by armed gunmen in the early hours of Wednesday in what Haitian authorities said was “a highly coordinated attack by a highly trained and heavily armed group.”

Haiti declared a 15-day “state of siege” in the immediate aftermath of his killing, pledging to bring the perpetrators to justice. Haitian authorities say an armed commando of 28 men – 26 Colombians and two Haitian-Americans – burst in and opened fire on the couple in their home. Seventeen people have been arrested so far and at least three suspects were killed, but no motive has been made public.

Martine Moise was transported to a Haitian hospital after the attack and was later evacuated to Miami, Florida, for more treatment.

“In the blink of an eye, the mercenaries entered my home and riddled my husband with bullets ... without even giving him a chance to say a word,” she said in the audio message. She also said the mercenaries were sent to kill her husband “because of roads, water, electricity and referendum as well as elections at the end of the year so that there is no transition in the country.”

“I am crying, it is true, but we cannot let the country lose its way,” Martine Moise said. “We cannot let his blood ... have been spilled in vain.”

Jovenel Moise served as president since 2017 amid rising gang violence that has displaced thousands of people across the Haitian capital, Port-au-Prince, in recent weeks, and that also saw a journalist and prominent political activist fatally shot.

In recent months, the country had been rocked by large protests at which Haitians urged Moise to step down, saying he had exceeded his five-year term – a view shared by top jurists, civil society groups and the country’s political opposition. But Moise insisted his presidency expired next year.

His death has thrown Haiti, which suffers from widespread poverty, into increased political instability – especially since before his death, Moise had been ruling by decree and was accused of stripping several key institutions of their ability to function.

A power struggle appears to be brewing as neurosurgeon Ariel Henry, who was named prime minister by Jovenel Moise just days before he was killed, said he – not the acting premier – should lead the country.

“After the president’s assassination, I became the highest, legal and regular authority because there was a decree nominating me,” Henry told the Reuters news agency in a phone interview late on Friday.

Henry had not been sworn in to replace Joseph at the time of the assassination, however, which has created confusion over who is Haiti’s legitimate leader.

Claude Joseph, who was named interim prime minister in April after the resignation of Joseph Jouthe, has taken the reins of power so far, spearheading the government’s response to the assassination, appealing to the United States for support and declaring a 15-day “state of siege”.

Elections Minister Mathias Pierre said Joseph would keep that role until presidential and legislative elections are held on September 26th.

Under Haiti’s 1987 constitution, the head of the Supreme Court should take over as interim president. But amendments that are not unanimously recognised state that it be the prime minister, or, in the last year of

a president's mandate – as was the case with Moise – that parliament should elect a president.

Further complicating the situation, the head of the Supreme Court died last month after contracting COVID-19 amid a surge in infections. There is also no sitting parliament as legislative elections scheduled for late 2019 were postponed amid political unrest.

Andre Michel, a Haitian lawyer and political opposition leader, said on Friday night that “the solution to the political crisis must be Haitian and largely concerted between the political class, civil society, the Diaspora and grassroots groups.” “Any other process is unhealthy and dead on arrival,” he tweeted.

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