

Haitian gang demands \$1 million each for kidnapped U.S. missionaries

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Haitians protested against rising violence, fuel and food shortages at the home of acting Prime Minister Ariel Henry Port-au-Prince, Haiti, on October 19 [Matias Delacroix/AP Photo]

Port-au-Prince, October 20 (RHC)-- A gang that kidnapped members of a Christian missionary group from the United States is demanding \$1 million in ransom per person, a top Haitian official told The Associated Press on Tuesday.

The official, who was not authorised to speak to the press, said someone from the 400 Mawozo gang called in the ransom demand shortly after kidnapping the missionaries on October 16th.

A person in contact with the Christian Aid Ministries, who also spoke on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the situation, confirmed the \$1-million-per-person demand to the AP.

Haiti has descended into increasing lawlessness following the assassination of President Jovenel Moise in July and a magnitude-7.2 earthquake in August. Kidnappings by armed gangs have spiked, and fuel and food shortages and a new wave of migrants leaving the impoverished Caribbean island nation.

Haitian workers went on a general strike on October 18 to protest worsening insecurity and gang violence after the abduction of the Christian missionaries. "Many people, including CAM management and Haitian and US authorities, are working diligently to bring our loved ones home safely," Christian Aid said in a statement on Tuesday without acknowledging the ransom request.

The adults being held captive range in age from 18 to 48, while the children are aged eight months, three years, six years, 13 years and 15 years, according to the statement. Sixteen of the abductees are Americans and one is Canadian.

The group was returning from visiting an orphanage when they were abducted on October 16, the Ohio-based organisation said. "This group of workers has been committed to minister throughout poverty-stricken Haiti," the ministry said, adding that the missionaries were most recently working on a rebuilding project to help people who lost homes in the earthquake.

The U.S. has sent a team of FBI agents and Department of State diplomats to Port-au-Prince to work with Haitian authorities. U.S. State Department spokesman Ned Price said on Monday U.S. officials had been in constant contact with Haiti's National Police, the missionary group and the victims' relatives.

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