

UN raises concern over Haitian gangs' recruitment of children

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Residents raise their arms as they flee their homes due to continuing gun battles between rival gangs in Port-au-Prince [Ralph Tedy Erol/Reuters]

Port-au-Prince, May 11 (RHC)-- The United Nations has expressed concern over the recruitment of children by Haitian gangs, as escalating violence in the capital, Port-au-Prince, has forced thousands from their homes and killed dozens of civilians.

The UN "is particularly worried about the recruitment of minors within the gangs, one of the six serious violations of the rights of the child", the Integrated Office of the United Nations in Haiti tweeted on

Wednesday.

The UN in Haiti “condemns the armed gang violence ongoing since April 24 that is affecting the communities in the north and northeast of Port-au-Prince, which has killed dozens of Haitians and injured and displaced thousands of others”, it said.

A day earlier, the UN’s deputy spokesman Farhan Haq warned that unrest was growing between gangs in the neighbourhoods of Croix-des-Bouquets, Cite Soleil, Bas Delmas and Martissant.

“According to our humanitarian colleagues, violence in the commune of Croix-des-Bouquets has displaced more than 1,200 people ... at least 26 civilians have been killed and 22 injured, although these figures are probably higher,” he said, according to a statement.

While gang violence has been a problem in Haiti for years, it has worsened in the aftermath of President Jovenel Moise’s July 2021 assassination, which plunged the country into an even deeper political and social crisis.

Last week, a video circulated on Haitian social media showing a masked pre-teen child wielding a high-calibre automatic weapon. In the clip, taken in Martissant, a poor neighbourhood in western Port-au-Prince that has been entirely controlled by gangs since last year, the boy explains he is at war with a rival gang’s leader.

The UN’s denunciation of the criminal groups’ inclusion of children comes as gang control has continued to spread to the city’s northern and eastern suburbs.

In a statement released on Wednesday afternoon, Haiti’s civil protection authority estimated that at least 39 people have been killed and 68 injured between April 24 and May 2nd. It also said about 9,000 people were displaced from three communities in suburban Port-au-Prince.

Earlier in the day, the foreign minister of the Dominican Republic said that a diplomat kidnapped in Haiti in late April had been released after “four days of kidnapping.”

The national police and other government officials have not yet commented on this latest outbreak of violence. In October of last year, Haitian Prime Minister Ariel Henry condemned the rise in gang violence and kidnappings.

“If they do not stop their wrongdoing, the law will apply to them,” Henry said in a televised address at that time. “The only option for bandits and all their sponsors is imprisonment or death if they do not want to change professions.”

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