

UN chief calls for armed action in Haiti as crisis persists

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?Haitian protesters demand resignation of prime minister and no foreign intervention.??

United Nations, October 18 (RHC)-- The head of the United Nations has reiterated a call for “armed action” in Haiti, warning that residents face a “nightmarish” situation, especially in the capital, Port-au-Prince.

Speaking to reporters on Monday, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said he believed such action was necessary to ease Haitian gangs’ grip on a port that is critical to allowing fuel supplies into the country.

A weeks-long gang blockade of the Varreux terminal in Port-au-Prince has led to critical shortages of fuel and water, and complicated efforts to respond to a dangerous outbreak of cholera. “It’s an absolutely nightmarish situation for the population of Haiti, especially in Port-au-Prince,” Guterres said during a news conference.

“I believe that we need not only to strengthen the [Haitian] police – strengthening it with training, with equipment, with a number of other measures – but that in the present circumstances, we need an armed action to release the port and to allow for a humanitarian corridor to be established.”

Haitian Prime Minister Ariel Henry this month asked the international community to help set up a “specialised armed force” to quell the violence, which has worsened in the power vacuum created by the July 2021 assassination of President Jovenel Moise.

But many Haitian protesters and civil society leaders have rejected the prospect of international intervention, saying history has demonstrated that foreign forces bring “more problems than solutions” to the country.

UN forces were linked to a 2010 cholera outbreak that killed approximately 10,000 people in Haiti, and years of international efforts to bolster Haitian democratic institutions and law enforcement capacity have largely failed.

The current crisis also has put a spotlight on questions around the legitimacy of Henry, who took up the prime minister’s post just weeks after Moise’s killing and has the backing of foreign governments, including the so-called CORE Group of nations.

Haitians have protested over the last several weeks amid the fuel and water crisis, with many calling on Henry to step down.

On Saturday, Canada and the United States announced the delivery of security equipment purchased by the Haitian government, including “tactical and armoured vehicles” to be used by the Haitian National Police (HNP). “This equipment will assist the HNP in their fight against criminal actors who are fomenting violence and disrupting the flow of critically-needed humanitarian assistance, hindering efforts to halt the spread of cholera,” Global Affairs Canada, a federal ministry, said in a statement.

Henry welcomed the transfer, saying on Twitter that Haiti would continue to count on its partnership with both countries, “with the aim of reinforcing the capacity of our police force”.

Guterres on October 9 had urged the international community “to consider as a matter of urgency” Haiti’s call for a specialised armed force. Last week, US President Joe Biden’s administration said it was reviewing the request.

Meanwhile, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced on October 12 that Washington would accelerate the delivery of humanitarian assistance to people in Haiti, nearly half of whom face acute food insecurity, according to the UN.

Blinken also said new visa restrictions were imposed against Haitian officials and others “involved in the operation of street gangs and other Haitian criminal organisations”. He did not specify which officials were targeted.

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