

Gang-related violence in Haiti leaves 600 dead in April

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Armed urban gang members in Haiti, May, 2023. | Photo: Twitter/ @SkandalNews

Port-au-Prince, May 9 (RHC)-- At the presentation of his latest report on Tuesday, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk warned that a vicious cycle is taking shape in Haiti due to the appearance of vigilantes who take the law into their own hands to fight armed gangs.

During the first quarter of the year, at least 846 people were killed, 393 were injured, and 395 were kidnapped, according to the Human Rights Service of the United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH).

"In the month of April alone, more than 600 people were killed in a new wave of extreme violence that hit several districts across the capital," BINUH pointed out. "Haiti is seeing a worrying increase in mob killings and lynchings of alleged gang members, with at least 164 of these murders documented in April," it added.

While all this is happening, Haitian institutions remain incapable of responding to the internal security challenges that chronic violence permanently fuels. "People should be able to rely on the police and the

judicial authorities to tackle gang violence. But the reality is that the State does not have the capacity to respond. People are thus taking the law into their own hands – but this will only fuel the spiral of violence,” Turk warned.

The BINUH quarterly report also underscores that the violence is "spreading relentlessly as gangs seek to extend their control. Areas of the capital previously considered safe, notably Kenscoff and Petion Ville, as well as the Artibonite department, are now affected."

In this context, Haitians are witnessing the emergence of new atrocities, among which are "incidents of snipers indiscriminately shooting at people on the street or firing into homes, and of people being burned alive on public transport."

"We must not forget that extreme poverty and the lack of basic services lie at the root of the current violence and of the gangs' power over communities," Turk said, adding that "the current human rights emergency calls for a robust response – urgently .”

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