

U.S. orders non-emergency personnel to leave Haiti

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Port-au-Prince, July 28 (RHC)-- The United States has ordered non-emergency government personnel to leave Haiti, as the Caribbean nation continues to reel under widespread gang violence, kidnappings and political instability.

In a travel advisory issued late on Thursday, the U.S. State Department ordered the departure of non-emergency personnel and their family members, and said U.S. citizens in Haiti should leave “as soon as possible.”

“Kidnapping is widespread, and victims regularly include US citizens,” the statement said, adding that violent crimes including armed robbery and carjackings are also common. “Protests, demonstrations, tire burning, and roadblocks are frequent, unpredictable, and can turn violent. The U.S. government is extremely limited in its ability to provide emergency services to U.S. citizens in Haiti,” it said.

Gang violence has surged in Haiti and the capital, Port-au-Prince, particularly after the July 2021 assassination of President Jovenel Moise. And the country’s virtually non-existent government system has made stemming attacks even more difficult.

The violence has impeded access to healthcare facilities, forced the closure of schools and clinics, and worsened already dire food insecurity by cutting residents of gang-controlled areas off from critical supplies.

And Haiti's de facto leader, Prime Minister Ariel Henry, whom Moïse chose for the post just days before he was killed, has faced a crisis of legitimacy – and attempts to chart a political transition for Haiti have failed.

This week, groups of displaced Haitians gathered outside the U.S. embassy in Port-au-Prince to try to seek safety from the gangs. "Gangs just shoot and they ask for control of the area. They took our house and we are in the street. We want help to go back home," one woman outside the embassy said, as reported by CNN.

Last October, Henry called on the international community to help set up a "specialised armed force" to quell the violence, a demand that has the backing of the US and the United Nations.

"Solutions to the crisis must be owned and led by the people of Haiti, but the scale of the problems is such that they require the international community's immediate response and support," UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said in April.

And in mid-July, the UN Security Council adopted a resolution (PDF) urging member states to provide support to the Haitian National Police, "including through the deployment of a specialized force, upon consultation with Haitian stakeholders."

But no country has agreed to lead the mission, and some Haitian civil society leaders have rejected the prospect of foreign intervention, saying past deployments have brought more harm than good to the country.

Many instead have called on countries to better equip Haiti's national police force – which lacks resources to take on the gangs – as well as to stop the flow of weapons into the country and sanction corrupt Haitian political and business actors. "There is a strong case for deploying an international force to Haiti, but it could be a very risky mission," Richard Gowan, an analyst at the International Crisis Group, told the AFP news agency this week.

"The gangs are well-armed and there is no clear exit strategy if a mission does deploy," he said.

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