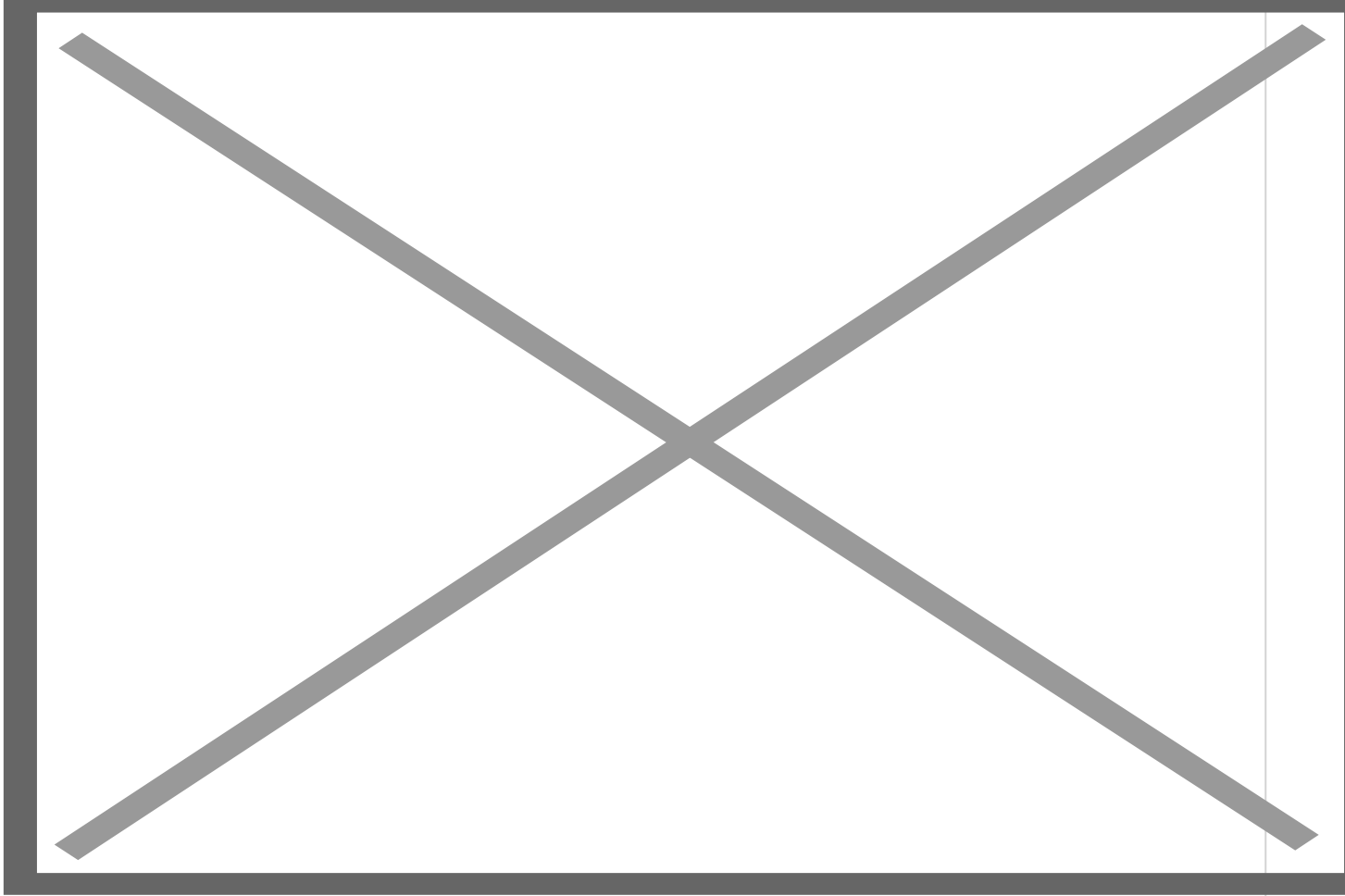


Haiti establishes council to choose new leaders as gang violence rages

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People take cover from gunfire near the National Palace, in Port-au-Prince, Haiti [File: Ralph Tedy Erol/Reuters]

Port-au-Prince, April 13 (RHC)-- Haiti has formally established a transitional council to fill a leadership vacuum by choosing a new prime minister, and to restore order in the Caribbean country ravaged by gang

violence. A decree published in the official gazette announced the formation of the Presidential Transitional Council on Friday, a month after Prime Minister Ariel Henry said he would step down amid a wave of attacks by armed gangs in the capital, Port-au-Prince.

There was no immediate comment from Henry following the publication of the decree and questions remain about the nine-member council's viability with no details on a timeframe to install the body and select a new prime minister and cabinet.

The decree also did not name the members of the council, the Reuters news agency reported. It said Henry and the council will govern the country until the new body names his replacement.

The Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM), a regional bloc, said in a statement that the council's mission "is to put Haiti back on the road to dignity, democratic legitimacy, stability and sovereignty and to ensure the proper functioning of the State's institutions".

The decree also said the council would help speed the deployment of international troops that Henry requested in 2022 to aid police in their battles with armed and increasingly powerful gangs. It stipulates that the council be based in the National Palace in central Port-au-Prince, which has come under fire several times in the past weeks.

U.S. Department of State spokesman Matthew Miller welcomed the announcement and said it will help "pave the way for free and fair elections" in the country and expedite the deployment of a multinational force.

Kim Ives, a journalist at the Haiti Liberte newspaper, said that despite the announcement, the political crisis is still a long way from being resolved. "The only thing they've done so far is publish it in a journal of record. It doesn't actually install them," he told Al Jazeera.

"The whole thing is completely dysfunctional because all the different corners of the very fractured political class are represented." Others also see the formation of the council as a solution "concocted" in Washington, DC, and those taking part in it "are seen as traitors", Ives added.

"Basically, it's not a Haitian solution in any way. It's a Washington solution."

Haiti has not held elections since 2016 and has been without a president since Jovenel Moise was assassinated in 2021. Henry was in Kenya in February, trying to organise the international police force deployment, when gangs launched a coordinated attack and demanded the 74-year-old's resignation.

Some 4,000 inmates were released in gang raids on Haiti's two biggest prisons. Police stations came under assault and attacks on the country's airport resulted in Haiti being largely cut off from the world.

Since the violence erupted, nearly 95,000 people have fled the metropolitan area of the capital as armed gangs cemented their control. Haitians are lacking basic goods as key ports remain closed, while the outgoing government remains absent.

In the country of 11 million people, about one million are on the brink of famine, according to the United Nations.

Countries including the United States and European Union members evacuated their diplomats and nationals as security conditions worsened. After the decree was published, local media reported more gunfire in parts of Port-au-Prince.



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