

Doctors Without Borders cites police violence as operations suspended in Haitian capital

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Port-au-Prince, November 21 (RHC)-- Doctors Without Borders, known by its French initials MSF, announced it has halted services in the Haitian capital Port-au-Prince due to "violence and threats from police." The international medical charity said in a statement overnight on Tuesday that police officers had repeatedly stopped its vehicles and threatened staff with death and rape over the past week.

Haiti has been plagued by violence and instability in recent years, with police and vigilantes now fighting a vicious war against gangs that took control of most of Port-au-Prince earlier this year. The chaos has left MSF as one of the main providers of quality healthcare in Haiti. However, the NGO said patient admissions have been suspended in five medical facilities in the capital until further notice.

“We are used to working in conditions of extreme insecurity in Haiti and elsewhere, but when even law enforcement becomes a direct threat, we have no choice but to suspend our projects,” said Haiti mission chief Christophe Garnier. The move follows an attack last week on an ambulance by “members of a vigilante group and law enforcement officers”, who surrounded the vehicle, tear-gassed staff and executed “at least two” patients, MSF said.

The NGO cited four separate incidents of police threats. In one, an armed plain-clothed officer said on November 18 that he would start executing and burning staff, patients and ambulances as of next week. The suspension of MSF’s medical services comes amid deepening turmoil in Haiti.

Earlier this month, interim Prime Minister Garry Conille was sacked by the country’s ruling council, which was set up to restore order amid the surging gang violence. The UN reports that gangs controlling 85 percent of the city have forced more than 20,000 people to flee Port-au-Prince in recent days, adding to the more than 700,000 people left homeless in recent years.

Vigilante groups have arisen in turn, and have reportedly joined police in carrying out harsh reprisals as the gangs have sought to extend their control into further areas of the city. Haiti’s government had in 2022 called for international support to help its police fight the gangs, who are accused of mass sexual violence, ransom kidnappings, extortion, child recruitment and blocking off supplies.

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) approved a support mission last October, but it has so far deployed just a fraction of the promised personnel.

[SOURCE: AL JAZEERA AND NEWS AGENCIES]

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