

**Presentation SRSG OAS in Haiti
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Working Group on Haiti
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Thank you very much Chair, Ambassador Anthony Philipp-Spencer, for your leadership over these past months at the helm of the Working Group of the Permanent Council on the situation in Haiti. It has been an enormous endeavor, a complex task -to say the least. Under your leadership and with your steadfast support, the OAS managed to adopt a strong resolution on Haiti on February 10th, which provided encouragement to Member States and Permanent Observers and a mechanism for countries to continually engage with Haiti. This resolution, (CP/RES. 1214(2414/23), created the working group and kept the Council abreast of developments in Haiti since its adoption.

Under your leadership, the OAS also passed a powerful General Assembly Resolution that calls on the OAS to facilitate immediate technical assistance to Haiti, for security, the preservation and strengthening of representative democracy, the promotion and protection of human rights, for humanitarian assistance, and for inclusive, free, fair and credible elections, as soon as conditions allow (AG/doc.5813/23).

I would also like to recognize both Vice Chairs, Ambassador Schalkwijk and Ambassador Mora, for their unwavering support to this Working Group on the humanitarian and democracy clusters respectively.

Lastly, I would like to recognize all the members of the Working Group, at times it felt that the whole Permanent Council was taking place in it, a testament of the importance that Haiti is to the region, my deepest gratitude to all of you for keeping the subject matter relevant and at the top of the InterAmerican agenda during these troubling and trying times for Haiti.

Last week, Haiti commemorated the second anniversary of the assassination of President Jovenel Moise and since then, the country has been submerged in a deep political crisis exacerbated by an unprecedented rise in insecurity. Armed gangs have imposed terror on large swaths of the country. The humanitarian and human rights situation continues to worsen the already fragile situation on the ground. The Working Group has already been extensively briefed on these topics, so I will not address them further today.

One point that I would like to reiterate today, however, is the importance of continuing the investigation into the assassination of President Moise. It is critical to support the inquiry into the masterminds of this heinous crime who must be brought to justice. The individuals who financed and carried out the assassination are at the core of the issues that have enabled corruption, arms trafficking, drug trafficking, and the spread of gang violence. All of these illicit activities have facilitated Haiti's current spiral and must be addressed if we want to support

haitians in strengthening their institutions, fighting corruption and violence and restoring peace and stability. By addressing this assassination, we will be tackling the fundamental issues that have weakened the Haitian state and allowed lawlessness to thrive.

The question that I ask of you, now that we've had ample opportunity to be briefed on Haiti, the many Working Group Sessions, a Permanent Council Resolution, a General Assembly Resolution, what will be our stance on this particular issue as we move forward?

Last October, Haiti requested assistance of the UN and the OAS to address the worsening security situation that is afflicting the country. After months of discussions, the needle has yet to move at the UN, as Haiti continues a downward spiral.

As the CARICOM initiative has yet to bear fruit and discussions did not advance over the weekend, how can the OAS continue to play a role in seeking out solutions?

There is a real sense that every now and again the country, Haiti, is taken captive by harmful political games and that part of the solution somehow is proposed without the need for elections and long periods of transition, undermining the will of the people. We cannot promote extended transitions as a democratic tool per se. On the contrary. They are fundamentally undemocratic.

There is no other political status without democratic representation than that of so-called transitions. The success of the permanent transition formula in Haiti is quite remarkable. Thirty six years and twelve transitions underline the competence of those who, while defending democracy, want it their way. That is, without the involvement of the most important stakeholder, the people and citizens of Haiti. All of us want some kind of national accord, not so much for a prolonged transition but rather for the democratic renewal of Haiti and the return to constitutional order in a timely and orderly fashion.

On the security front I do not see any scenario where there is a viable positive outcome for Haiti, without significant international presence on the ground. Whatever form this may take, it should at least be discussed in the appropriate forum, including here at the OAS, as treaties enable these kinds of discussions.

In a country of 12 million inhabitants that has less than 9,500 police officers, where only around 3,500 police officers are on duty at any given time, Haiti cannot possibly tackle this insurmountable task alone.

Citizens are fending for themselves and taking up arms in a vigilante justice system where extrajudicial killings are becoming the norm as we have been witnessing recently. This could become an explosive situation as the worst may be yet to come as gangs get stronger and security forces weaken.

Impunity, corruption, a weak justice system, and co-opted governance are rarely conducive to the advancement of a more just social order and the development of an open society.

This system, the political system, has failed the Haitian people and needs to be revamped if Haiti is going to address the daunting challenges that lie ahead.

Nearly all of the accords proposed, and wider conscience from the political elites, have called for the need for a new constitution, which would be an opportunity to address the underlying problems we have mentioned. It would allow for an independent justice system, integrity of the elected, decline in impunity, fight against corruption, an overhaul of the electoral system, and increased rule of law. These are the core issues of the current political framework that need to be revamped and have been addressed to a certain extent in the latest draft of a new constitution.

But this process needs to be as inclusive as possible, with broad participation of every sector of society a national union of sorts is needed if the effort is going to be sustained and later endorsed by the population through a referendum. The situation is not ideal, but there is a silver lining in trying to revamp the current political system by a democratic approach to structural change. In truth, there has never been a better time to do this than now. It is not the easiest of approaches but at the same time, it is the most solid.

Over the past five years, the OAS has been working nonstop to address these structural issues in Haiti. With support from USAID, we are supporting the National Identification Office in Haiti to finish registering the entire Haitian adult population. Building on the OAS' 18 year partnership with ONI, which began at its inception in 2005, the project will also support them in preparing a strategic plan and build a foundation for an integrated civil registry. Through a widespread awareness campaign, the project will work to ensure that the most isolated and marginalized groups in Haiti have the basic human right to identity and be able to vote when elections are called.

With support from INL, OAS has also been training community police officers to fight the influence of gangs in the Port-au-Prince metropolitan area and soon in other parts of Haiti. In coordination with the Secretariat for Rights and Equity, the OAS Office in Haiti has supported nearly 30 community-based organizations, facilitated dialogue and improved the relationship between the police and the communities where they work. In parallel, the OAS has also been working to train the Haitian Judicial Police, BAFE, through a joint project with the UNODC and with recent support from Italy as well.

We cannot waiver in our support to Haiti at this critical juncture. Now more than ever, Member States and Permanent Observers must provide additional resources to fight insecurity, strengthen institutions and put Haiti back on the path towards a democratic renewal.

Thank you so much.