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Chair: Mr. Sameer Zuberi

Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

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• (0850)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Mr. Sameer Zuberi (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.)): Good morning, everyone.

[*English*]

I call this meeting to order.

[*Translation*]

Welcome to meeting number 22 of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights.

[*English*]

This meeting is happening in a hybrid format, pursuant to the order of June 23, 2022.

I have a few comments for the witnesses and the members here in person and participating by Zoom.

Please wait until I recognize that you have the floor. When you speak via Zoom, and even in person, speak slowly and clearly for the interpreters. They interpret what you're saying and put that into another language, either English or French.

For those participating by Zoom, you can choose either floor, English or French.

Today we're going to be continuing the study on Haiti.

[*Translation*]

We have two witnesses appearing in person and several others participating by videoconference.

First, we have with us, in the room, Monique Clesca, Journalist, Writer and Pro-Democracy Activist, from the Bureau de suivi de l'Accord de Montana.

[*English*]

Also in person we have, from Partners In Health Canada, Mark Brender, national director.

We have online, from Centre d'analyse et de recherche en droits de l'homme, Gédéon Jean, chief executive officer. From the International Crisis Group, we have Renata Segura, associate director, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Diego Da Rin, consultant, Latin America and the Caribbean.

[*Translation*]

We also have, participating by Zoom, Pastor Jean Kisomair Duré, from the Protestant Federation of Haiti.

[*English*]

Everyone will have five minutes for opening remarks, except for the International Crisis Group. Given that you have two witnesses with us, both of you together will have five minutes.

I'll now open up the floor.

[*Translation*]

We will begin with Monique Clesca.

[*English*]

I'll give a hand signal when you have one minute left and when you have 30 seconds left. I'll have to interject once we get to five minutes.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Clesca (Journalist, Writer and Pro-Democracy Activist, Bureau de suivi de l'Accord de Montana): Ladies and gentlemen, on behalf of the Commission to Search for a Haitian Solution to the Crisis and the Bureau de suivi de l'Accord de Montana, which monitors the Montana Accord of August 30, 2021, thank you for this invitation.

Haiti is currently under siege by heavily armed men and women. What is worse, the government, politicians and economic sectors are funding and arming those gangs. We are mired in a situation of profound crisis characterized by a denial of justice and our fundamental rights. The Haitian government is incapable and unwilling to perform its essential function, which is to meet the needs and honour the basic rights of its population.

The present crisis, which has been caused and fomented by men who wield the country's political and economic power, is social, legal, constitutional, economic and political. However, the human rights situation in Haiti cannot be considered apart from the general situation that existed prior to the political crisis.

Since the Haitian Tèt Kale Party, the PHTK, came to power 11 years ago, the state, which should be protecting us, has become a predator state, a criminal state. It is a state in decay, given the pervasive corruption, impunity and ineptitude of its law enforcement agencies, which have also been infiltrated by gangs. As a result of his general indifference, the public has taken to the streets with their claims and demands for accountability for the scandals and respect for fundamental rights and human dignity.

We are experiencing a situation of insecurity, terror and abuse, a situation that I must say preceded the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse, whose term in office was marred by 13 massacres, the politicization of the national police force and the scuttling of Haiti's institutions, including its parliament and high court of appeal.

Ariel Henry, who was sworn in as a result of a tweet from the international community, has no legitimacy. The situation under his autocratic rule is disastrous, and the gangs have rushed in to fill the void. His illegal power has lost its ability to secure even the country's strategic infrastructure and resources, such as its national roads and natural gas.

As the Haitians say, "Pa gen leta", there is no state. The state doesn't listen to us. The state provides services, hence Haitians' complete loss of trust in the state.

However, there are many specific things that the Henry government could have done, but he has chosen to sit back and do nothing. Instead of rolling up his sleeves and getting to work, on October 7, the illegitimate man in power sought foreign assistance and called on the international community to conduct a military intervention in our country, a crime of high treason. His request underscores the failure of the Henry government and thus international diplomacy that installed him in power and that continues to support him, despite his illegitimate and disastrous governance, perhaps as a result of his complicity in the current disastrous situation.

The Montana Accord proposes a two-year disruptive transition in order to restore the state's sovereign functions and public trust in the country's institutions and political system. We must break with this predatory and autocratic political class and reestablish proper governance. This transition must lead to organized elections, but a framework must be provided in order to guarantee that they are free, credible, transparent and nonviolent.

We are opposed to military intervention in Haiti. However, we want the Police nationale d'Haiti, the PNH, to be reinforced. With technical, financial, logistical and technological assistance, the PNH will be able to make our national roads safe and to connect the country with itself.

The issue today is far greater than merely establishing some semblance of security, and no mopping up operations will solve the problems of the gangs and humanitarian needs. It's not a problem of boots on the ground, but rather a socioeconomic problem. We want programs that promote the entry of disadvantaged young men and women into the economy. We want cooperation consistent with our dignity and sovereignty.

● (0855)

We immediately need urgent humanitarian assistance for people displaced by gangs and living in occupied territories. We need an economic recovery with long-term impact. We will also need to organize a sovereign national conference so we can at last listen to the people.

Our struggle is part of the search for "a Haitian solution", an expression that was conceived by the commission that drafted the

Montana Accord and that refers to a broad consensus among all Haitians.

The Chair: Thank you for your testimony, Ms. Clesca.

We will continue with Mr. Brender.

[English]

You have five minutes.

Mr. Mark Brender (National Director, Partners In Health Canada): Thank you.

It's a privilege to share the perspective of Partners In Health amidst the current crisis. I'd like to thank the committee for the attention you've been giving to Haiti.

Partners In Health was founded in Haiti in the mid-1980s. It's where so much of our organizational expertise and values come from, so we're very appreciative of this opportunity.

Haiti, as we know, is the world's first independent Black republic and the first to overthrow colonial rule, setting the path for independence movements worldwide. It's a legacy that created a better world for all of us, and it's one that we should never forget. We should not forget, either, that Haiti was made to pay a devastating price for its freedom through reparations to its colonizers and geopolitical sanctions, with impacts continuing to this day.

Canada has been part of that history. For far too long, Canada and other countries have taken it upon themselves to decide what happens in Haiti, when it is, of course, Haitians who should decide and it is their voices we should be listening to. It is crucial that we are discerning about which Haitian voices we seek out. Is it the voices of the powerful minority or of the vulnerable majority?

I say this to be clear that while I am speaking in my capacity with Partners in Health Canada, a global health and social justice NGO, I do so only with the approval and support of our Haitian colleagues with Zanmi Lasante, as Partners In Health is known in Haiti.

Zanmi Lasante is today the largest health care provider in the country, after the ministry of health, supporting 17 health facilities across two of Haiti's most vulnerable districts and serving a tertiary catchment area of 3.9 million people. Zanmi Lasante's 6,500-person Haitian staff are of and from the communities they serve, working to support the realization of social and economic rights for their communities and their country.

The central crisis that our Haitian colleagues are dealing with today amidst an unprecedented fuel crisis, gang violence, kidnappings, individual and societal trauma, widespread hunger and now the re-emergence of cholera is the prospect of not being able to keep health facilities and hospitals we support open. Our colleagues are rightly proud that all 17 facilities have stayed open to serve patients, when up to 75% of facilities in the country are not able to offer even the most basic care.

One of those facilities still open is the University Hospital of Mirebalais, a 300-bed teaching hospital built by Partners in Health after the 2010 earthquake. The hospital generators need 23,000 gallons of fuel a month to keep functioning. When the main fuel terminal in Port-au-Prince was blocked by gangs, Zanmi Lasante staff walked with mules through the mountains to the Dominican Republic, six hours each way, to get fuel. They did some 10 to 15 trips this way. At other times, they risked their lives to find fuel elsewhere.

There are two Canada-funded projects of note. One has treated more than 4,300 children for severe and moderate acute malnutrition. Another has provided support for more than 1,600 survivors of gender-based violence, while building links between the health, police and justice sectors, and community and women's groups. They adapted their programming but never stopped operating, in spite of today's challenges.

Cholera is now at the forefront of everyone's mind, with more than 13,000 suspected and confirmed cases to date, and 280 deaths. These are severe undercounts, for sure. Children under five are most at risk, because malnutrition weakens their young immune systems, making them more vulnerable to contaminated water and poor sanitation and therefore more vulnerable to disease and death.

There is a global shortage of the cholera vaccine because there is limited funding for a disease that overwhelmingly affects poor countries, but Zanmi Lasante staff know how to respond, even in a crisis. They are preparing to lead a vaccination campaign for 105,000 people in Mirebalais, with initial doses expected to arrive next week.

Haitians are doing their best in an impossible situation. Our ask is that during this crisis and after it, we find, listen to and support deep-rooted Haitian organizations working for the betterment of their country, and that we do so with what our late co-founder Dr. Paul Farmer called "pragmatic solidarity". In other words, we do it with material support that addresses material needs.

We have urgent needs for fuel and storage capacity. We need a new warehouse so that supplies are closer to patients and less vulnerable to road blockages. We urgently need medical supplies and additional staff for cholera, and we need to invest further in solar capacity across our facilities to reduce our dependence on fuel for the long term. Canada can help in all of these areas right now.

• (0900)

Just as critically, "pragmatic solidarity" means progressive development and international assistance policies that will allow Haiti to build stronger health systems and allow Haitians and the global community to respond better during times of crisis.

I'd be pleased to provide some examples in the question period.

Thank you again for this opportunity.

The Chair: Thank you for that, Mr. Brender.

[*Translation*]

We will continue with Mr. Gédéon Jean.

[*English*]

You have five minutes, please.

Your connection might not be....

We're going to continue on to our next witness due to connection issues.

We'll have the International Crisis Group, please, for five minutes.

Dr. Renata Segura (Associate Director, Latin America and Caribbean, International Crisis Group): Thank you very much.

For clarification, I will be doing the five-minute intervention. My colleague can join us during the question period.

Thank you for having invited us this morning to join you in the proceedings. All protocols are observed.

The International Crisis Group has been working in Haiti for many years. As a conflict prevention organization that bases its analysis in fieldwork and extensive interviews with Haitian actors, we hope to reflect the multitude of opinions that we have encountered in our work there.

I would like to focus my remarks today both on the merits and the obstacles of the request that foreign armed troops be sent to Haiti. Interim Prime Minister Ariel Henry has said that he needs help combatting the violent gangs that are terrorizing civilian populations in Port-au-Prince and beyond.

The UN Secretary-General, after sending a needs-assessment mission, agrees that this kind of intervention is necessary. His proposal to the Security Council includes two stages. First, a rapid-action task force would arrive in Haiti to help create humanitarian corridors to guarantee that there is safe passage of basic goods to the communities that need them. He then outlines some options for the medium term following withdrawal of the rapid-intervention force.

The first reaction of many Haitians to this proposal was overwhelmingly negative, and with good reasons: Haiti has suffered the consequences of detrimental colonial interventions throughout its entire history.

We understand and share the demands and concerns that are behind the call for a Haitian-led solution, but, as our recent visit to Haiti and many conversations in previous months have shown, the situation there is increasingly dramatic, and inaction might not necessarily be the best course of action.

The war led by gangs has not only resulted in murder, kidnappings and the strategic use of sexual violence to control the population; the gangs' control of ports, markets and roads has also limited access to fuel, food, water and medical services. Now the fast spread of cholera threatens to kill many more.

Our trip to Haiti, however, showed us something else. Many of the people we spoke to, particularly those who live in areas under gang control, called for international help. Many of these people spoke reluctantly. They did not want us to think that they support the government or that they are not patriots. They are also not blind to the difficulties a mission will face, but they see no other option. In the words of a man we spoke to in Port-au-Prince: "We are no fools. An armed intervention will not solve the situation, but to stop the spiral of violence, a multinational force is needed." These voices are not heard as frequently or as loudly, but they are certainly very much part of the conversation taking place in Haiti today.

The merits of sending troops, however, cannot be the only consideration in moving forward. It is important to understand that the political context will determine the chances for this force to succeed. Without a broad agreement among political and social forces in Haiti, these foreign troops could end up working to strengthen the mandate of Prime Minister Henry, which is widely disliked among the population, and it could end up making the political crisis even worse.

Another danger is that without such an agreement, if Prime Minister Henry ends up leaving power, the troops could find themselves working for a new government that does not welcome them.

This is why it is crucial that Haitians come together in a national dialogue of sorts to determine if they want the arrival of these troops, and if so, what exactly their mandate would be. Ideally, that agreement would also design a transitional government that is seen by all Haitians as legitimate and that can start the process of reconstructing the state, providing its citizens with much-needed access to services and rebuilding the electoral system so that a free and fair vote can take place in the future.

The content of that agreement is for Haitians to decide, although the international community must stand ready to serve as facilitator or mediator if that would be helpful to the process.

Thank you.

• (0905)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you for your testimony, Ms. Segura.

[*English*]

We'll now continue with our next witness.

From the Fédération protestante d'Haïti, we have Jean Duré for five minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Kisomair Dure (Pastor, Protestant Federation of Haiti): Good morning, members of the House of Commons.

The Protestant Federation of Haiti and the Haitian people thank you for this opportunity to examine the distressing situation that now endangers the lives of hundreds of thousands of Haitians.

For many years now, Haiti has existed at the centre of a maze in which efforts to preserve human dignity have yet to achieve their objective. The poverty in which Haiti's population of some 12 million inhabitants lives is infertile ground for progress in the human rights field.

According to the most recent Human Development Report, Haiti ranks 163rd out of 191 countries with a human development index of 0.535. According to data published by the World Bank, its infant mortality rate is 47 per 1,000 live births and its literacy rate is 62%. In addition, it is estimated that more than 6 million Haitians live below the poverty line and that more than 2.5 million have fallen below the extreme poverty threshold.

Despite the fact that Haiti ranks last in the Americas based on development indicators, it is in the midst of a political crisis that only exacerbates its situation.

As regards the right to justice, we have been witnessing the collapse of the country's legal system for more than 10 years. Most of Haiti's courts do not operate. Thugs have taken control of the courthouse premises in Port-au-Prince, contending that they paid for the release of their gang members, but that they are still being detained.

A document entitled, "N ap Mouri", which means, "We are dying", published by the human rights service of the United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti, has focused on the significant proportion of pre-trial detainees. No progress in this area has been made in the past 25 years. As of June 1, 2021, more than 82% of the overall prison population in Haiti had not been tried, and most were being unjustly detained.

As for the right to education, the state has access to only 15% of primary-level schools. Nearly 3,000 children live in the streets of the capital city, suffering all kinds of discrimination and humiliation. Some have had to leave their homes at a very young age.

With regard to the right to health, Haiti has an average of 5.9 physicians or nurses per 10,000 inhabitants. There is 0.7 hospital bed for every 1,000 inhabitants. Many Haitians living near the border seek health care in the Dominican Republic, which virtually hunts Haitians with persistence and hatred. In most rural areas, pregnant women give birth at home without the assistance of qualified medical personnel. No health or social programs are available to them.

As regards the right to life, the number of armed gangs is increasing across the country, particularly in the Département de l'Ouest. They are taking control of certain strategic areas, isolating the capital from the major provincial cities. According to an article published by AlterPresse on July 6, more than 550 murders were committed in the capital from January to June of this year. Freedom of movement is undermined by recurring acts of kidnapping and forcible confinement, which have consequences for all social classes.

Many families that have been dispossessed of their property are scattered around lawless zones. Church properties have been taken hostage. In Bel-Air, for example, two guards at one of the temples of the Nazarene Mission were shot dead in a cowardly incident by faithless and lawless thugs. In Bolosse, the premises of the UEBH Baptist mission, the Collège évangélique Maranatha and the Séminaire de théologie évangélique de Port-au-Prince have been abandoned to the gangs. The established authorities have made no attempt to put a stop to this situation, while the thugs happily post their fees on social media.

• (0910)

Hyperinflation is setting in, and the right of the vulnerable social classes to food and housing is being trampled. With growing concern in the midst of an unprecedented crisis in which the health system is failing, the Haitian population feels subjected to an inhumane form of oppression from which it has no means of escape.

The Chair: Mr. Duré, I would ask you please to conclude your presentation because we also have to hear the final witness.

Mr. Jean Kisomair Dure: All in all, the struggle for the emergence of the rule of law in Haiti is unending. The Protestant Federation of Haiti is committed to that struggle until we emerge victorious and the good triumphs in the faith. The darkness must be banished for the welfare of the Haitian people.

We wish to express our satisfaction with the most recent sanctions that Canada has imposed on those who support the thugs. We invite the friendly nations, Canada in particular, to help Haiti reinforce its national police force and army and to work with the health sectors of civil society toward the emergence of new leadership and home-grown development.

• (0915)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Duré.

We will now hear from the final witness.

Mr. Jean, we will try to hear your testimony despite the technical difficulties. If your connection is poor, we will ask you to switch off your camera.

[English]

We're going to see how this works.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean, you have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Gédéon Jean (Chief Executive Officer, Centre d'analyse et de recherche en droits de l'homme): Ladies and gentlemen, members of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights, Haiti is at the brink. This glaring reality commands our present government, which acts for the state, to discharge its obligation to honour, protect and assert human rights. The situation also calls for the international community to intervene on the principle that it has a responsibility to protect and for civil society to play its elite role.

I am going to discuss certain key indicators regarding the violation of the right to life, security and protection of the physical integrity of the person.

First, let's talk about homicide. From January to November of this year, the Centre d'analyse et de recherche en droits de l'homme has already recorded at least 1,192 deaths attributable to insecurity. Some 70% of those deaths occurred in metropolitan Port-au-Prince. Since November 2018, a series of killings has occurred in disadvantaged areas, particularly La Saline, Cité Soleil, Martissant, Bel-Air and Source Matelas.

As for kidnappings, the Cellule d'observation de la criminalité de the Centre d'analyse et de recherche en droits de l'homme has recorded 755 kidnappings from January to September of this year, 57 of which involved foreigners. Most of the victims were tortured. Women are subjected to gang rapes and other inhumane and degrading treatment.

With regard to gangs, 60% of Haitian territory is controlled by gangs, which are officially organized as two major federations: the G9 an Fanmi e Alye and the GPEP coalition. Some 200 armed groups are active in Haiti, most of which are located in metropolitan Port-au-Prince. One may well wonder if they are becoming a kind of proto-state like ISIS, the armed Islamic State group in Syria. The G9 group's nearly two-month hostage-taking at the Varreux oil terminal, which caused a humanitarian crisis and led to the virtually total shutdown of the country, is a clear illustration of that.

I will now discuss the violation of socioeconomic rights.

Prices of consumer goods have doubled in one year in a context in which more than 60% of the population live in abject poverty. This indicator, among many others, of course, affords an understanding of the situation of the half of the population living with chronic food insecurity. In addition, inflation soared 38.7% in September, a monthly rate of 8.2%.

As regards the right to education, to date, 47% of schools are still closed despite the fact that the blockade of the Varreux oil terminal has been lifted. In overall terms, this situation concerns the disadvantaged areas of Cité Soleil, Martissant, Croix-des-Bouquets, downtown Port-au-Prince, Bas-Delmas and others, which are generally dominated by the gangs.

Furthermore, the resurgent cholera epidemic has further restricted the right to health. Some 182 institutional deaths and 99 community deaths were reported on December 5 of this year. According to the ministry of public health and population, there have been 1,177 confirmed cases out of a total of 13,454 suspicious cases.

Now let's consider the rule of law.

With regard to governance, Haiti has removed itself from the democratic process and the rule of law. The Haitian parliament has been dysfunctional since January 13 of this year. Since Haiti's president was assassinated on July 7, 2021, the country has been governed by Prime Minister Ariel Henry, who performs the twofold executive role of president and prime minister.

In addition, Haitian justice, which is plagued by corruption and subjugated by successive executive authorities, has been dysfunctional since 2018, particularly as a result of waves of strikes by judges, bailiffs, government commissioners and others. Widespread insecurity has also resulted in the abandonment of buildings housing the country's courts. The Palais de justice de Port-au-Prince was abandoned and then taken over by a gang called 5 secondes. This is symptomatic of the glaring reality that currently predominates in Haiti.

Justice is now dysfunctional in law because the Cour de cassation, the highest judicial authority, is dysfunctional. It has only 3 of its 12 Judges.

The rate of prolonged preventive detention in Haiti is approximately 85%. Since January of this year, more than 100 deaths in prisons and detention centres have been reported. Those deaths were due to a lack of health care, food shortages and other degrading treatment. Most correctional centres, including the national penitentiary, Jacmel civilian prison and the Miragoâne correctional centre, resemble the concentration camps of the Nazis and other similar regimes.

● (0920)

As for the Police nationale d'Haiti, although its efforts are visible and quantifiable, it can't always contain the gangs, which are equipped with sophisticated weapons, quantities of ammunition, money and intelligence capabilities. The gangs are supported by policies and personalities from the private and other sectors. The national police don't have the material, technological or financial resources or the necessary training to contain the gangs.

In conclusion, according to the Centre d'analyse et de recherche en droits de l'homme, there needs to be a paradigm shift in cooperation with Haiti in order for it to achieve specific and sustainable results that actually assist in constructing the rule of law and democracy, in addition to providing appropriate responses to the multidimensional humanitarian crisis currently raging in Haiti.

We urgently need an international force—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Jean.

[English]

We'll continue with our questions and answers. You'll have the chance to continue your thoughts.

We're going to start with Mr. Aboultaif for seven minutes.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Thank you very much.

We've heard testimonies that shed light on the situation there. I'm hearing from Ms. Clesca, Mr. Brender and others is that military intervention is not a favourable solution. We have the gangs on one side, and the last witness referred to the gangs as being similar to the situation that happened in Syria, and we know how that ended up.

There is also the church. The church seems to be the only properly functioning entity out there. You don't support outside intervention and you don't think military intervention is a solution. With such a complicated situation, at all levels, do you believe the church can play a role in solving the problem in the country?

Ms. Monique Clesca: Thank you very much.

We do. As a matter of fact, the Commission pour la recherche d'une solution haïtienne à la crise, which I am honoured to be a member of and which is included in the Bureau de suivi de l'accord de Montana, includes the voodoo religion and the Episcopal church. The Fédération protestante d'Haïti was in it for quite a long time. It was in for over a year and a half, practically, and then left a few months ago.

We have done consistent, systematic outreach with the Catholic church. What we have been told by the Catholic church, when we met with them at different times, is that they follow what we're doing, but they do not want to be directly involved in finding a solution. They had, in a way, been burnt already. They already tried to do that, and the outcome was not favourable for them.

We believe churches—whether they're Catholic, Protestant, Episcopalian or of the voodoo religion—are important to the solution. Some of them are already part of the commission and the Montana accord. The question would be, can the Catholic church be a broker? Can it come in as a supporter or mediator? We do not know.

We insist it is extremely important that the different denominations be part of the solution. Some already are part of the greater consensus. What role the Catholic church will decide to play.... That's the one that is absent, along with the Fédération protestante d'Haïti. We aim to start re-dialoguing with them. We believe they are essential.

● (0925)

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Pastor Dure, do you believe that the international community is convinced that the church can probably play the role of being the broker or of leading the mission to provide the solution for the situation there?

[Translation]

Mr. Jean Kisomair Dure: The Protestant church, in particular, has previously proposed, for the community and political actors, that a commission be established that can assist in negotiations designed to find peaceful political solutions to the crisis.

In our view, we need to think about how to resolve this crisis through mediation and also about the aftermath of the crisis. There have been transitions and elections in the past, but they didn't alter the situation.

That's why the Montana Accord mentions a national conference that could help bring all the players together to build something solid so that Haiti can permanently emerge from this crisis.

[English]

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Thank you.

Mr. Jean, the 200 arms and gang groups are similar to what happened in Syria. We know that in Syria those people or those gang groups were supported by the surrounding neighbourhoods and a lot of intervention from other countries. Who is behind the gang groups in Haiti?

[Translation]

Mr. Gédéon Jean: There are a lot of actors behind these armed groups: politicians, private-sector personalities and people from civil society. Consequently, the situation in Haiti is extremely complicated.

If we really want to improve the situation, there has to be a force supporting the Police nationale d'Haïti. The police are currently under-equipped; they are a third-rate police force that can't really contain the gangs.

The present situation is really troubling: women are being raped, kidnappings have reached truly disturbing proportions, and we've seen a lot of violence-related deaths. In the circumstances, apart from political issues and negotiations, we really need to establish a force that's equal to the situation. From that standpoint, I think this is the lot of the vast majority of the population that's suffering. We need an international force to assist the Police nationale d'Haïti so it can actually intervene. This is a matter of security, survival and human rights.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC)): Thank you.

We'll now go to MP Dubourg for seven minutes.

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Bourassa, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

[Translation]

To begin with, I want to welcome all the witnesses who are with us this morning. I am very pleased to see them. We need to hear the views of the witnesses in order to know how we can help Haiti and the Haitian people. It's through them that we can find potential solutions.

My questions are for the witnesses in the order in which they gave their opening statements. Consequently, I'll go first to the representative of the Bureau de suivi de l'Accord de Montana.

Ms. Clesca, I want to congratulate you on the efforts that Haitians have made to find a solution. I understand that the situation is extremely complex and difficult.

With regard to the Montana group, you talked about meetings with a lot of people. Why has that group been unable to align the Montana Accord with the September 11 agreement, for example?

• (0930)

Ms. Monique Clesca: Being Haitian today means participating in the solidarity among Haitians; it means taking part in a permanent resistance at the individual and organizational levels, and it especially means telling ourselves that we can do it, and if we say we can do it, that means we must try.

The Montana group tried to expand the consensus, and the first thing that happened was that we were able to meet with the allies of Ariel Henry who signed the September 11 agreement. It has to be said: the September 11 agreement is the allied agreement of Ariel Henry, who is with the PHTK.

Mr. Henry informed us at one point that he had neither the authority nor the authorization to negotiate. We think that's clear. If the prime minister, who is illegitimate but who made his September 11 alliance, said he had neither the authority nor the authorization to negotiate, it won't be possible to do so until he manages to find that authority and that authorization to negotiate.

However, I'm going to venture a little further.

Mr. Henry has been in power for nearly 15 months now. Contrary to what Mr. Jean said, I want to point out that Mr. Henry isn't the president of Haiti. He is its prime minister, even though he is illegitimate; I acknowledge that. However, he isn't the president of Haiti, as Mr. Jean said.

At any event, Mr. Henry's record is the worst of all records. The largest massacres in Haiti, which have occurred recently, were committed under his governance. We can see none of the things that he nevertheless should have done. He could have opened dialogues with the public, but he didn't. He could have established emergency areas, but he didn't. He did nothing.

In our view today, Mr. Henry is part of the past. We can negotiate his exit with him, but we can't sit down and negotiate an agreement for him. The task ahead is to determine how he will leave so that a transitional government can be established.

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg: Thank you, Ms. Clesca. As you know, we don't have much time.

Ms. Monique Clesca: I understand.

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg: I would like to take up another topic in what little time I have left.

Earlier you said that this major Montana coalition that you formed included voodooists, Protestants and Catholics. That being said, as you know, our committee is mainly examining and studying human rights in Haiti. As we all know, abortion is illegal in Haiti. Section 262 of Haiti's criminal code provides that women may not choose to undergo an abortion.

How do you deal with that situation in the Montana group?

Ms. Monique Clesca: We are in favour of human rights and in favour of the freedom of men and women to make decisions concerning their bodies.

Within the Montana group, and within the Commission pour la recherche d'une solution haïtienne à la crise, which drafted the Montana Accord, there is a platform of feminist organizations that also advocate that women should have autonomous control over their bodies. They have been working for years to have legislation passed granting that autonomy.

That's why we're involved in the Conférence nationale souveraine en Haïti. At the conference, women, organizations of activist women and human rights organizations will be able to discuss this, and we'll be able to see how we can move forward on this issue.

• (0935)

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg: All right. Thank you very much.

I barely have a minute left, Ms. Clesca, and I have a brief final question for you.

As we all know, Canada has imposed sanctions on two senators who belonged to the Montana group. How did you react to that?

Ms. Monique Clesca: I'd like to correct something you said. Pardon me, but the sanctioned senators didn't belong to the Montana group.

After the Montana Accord, we tried to expand the consensus and we began talks with various political groups. That's how we established a consensus with the modified PEN group and the Grand rassemblement pour l'évolution d'Haïti, the GREH, to which Senator Youri Latortue and Joseph Lambert, president of the Senate belonged. That was in the context of the modified PEN group. At no time did they belong to the Montana group. The expanded consensus included the Montana group and the members of the modified PEN group and the GREH.

That's the situation. If you want to discuss sanctions, I can do so, but you're telling me we don't have enough time.

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg: That's correct.

Thank you for your answers, Ms. Clesca.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Arnold Viersen): Thank you.

We'll now hear from Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe for seven minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Ms. Clesca, I want to take this opportunity to ask you to tell us about the sanctions.

Ms. Monique Clesca: Thank you very much.

We're in favour of the sanctions. We've been saying for more than a year now that Haiti's various partners must be able to take measures under their legislation and develop public policies to control weapons and apply various sanctions. However, they must be careful in imposing sanctions, particularly when they do so in the economic sector. You have to understand that the three individuals who have been sanctioned until now control 30% to 50% of the banking sector. We therefore want to note that, in addition to those sanctions, specific measures are necessary to support the banking sector, which is already in precarious condition.

However, we understand the need to impose sanctions. You are an autonomous state, you have imposed sanctions, and we are grateful to you for that. We even think there are still a lot of names that don't appear on the list of persons targeted by these sanctions. However, support measures will also be necessary.

Furthermore, we Haitians will also have to be able to nationalize sanctions, as it were. We will have to determine what our legislation enables us to do. For example, will everything that Canada seizes or freezes revert to the Canadian government or to the Haitian government once we have a transitional government? These are all matters that will have to be discussed under a cooperative arrangement among Canada, Haiti and the transitional government.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: In that scenario, Mr. Henry will no longer be there; his exit will have been negotiated. I also think there's a consensus on that, but the analysts will tell us when they help us draft our report on this study. As we hear from witnesses, we realize that both Haitians in Haiti and members of the Haitian diaspora across Quebec, Canada and the United States feel that Mr. Henry's government is illegitimate. You're the first person to tell us that. Other witnesses have also said it today. So I think it's quite obvious.

You said in your opening statement that this was a political crisis and that the humanitarian crisis wouldn't be resolved until the political crisis had been resolved. I'd like you to explain to us why you said that, because I think it's essential to us in drafting our report and recommendations.

• (0940)

Ms. Monique Clesca: I think that virtually everyone has seen that the gangs were funded and armed by various sectors. Consider the examples of the instrumentalization of the gangs and their complicity in it. The government recently had the quite strange idea that it would distribute television sets among populations and communities so they could watch the World Cup. That's what the Henry government chose to do. He even invited community leaders for the occasion, including gang members, one of whom was even arrested. That's one example.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, distributions were made here and there, and one of the coordinators was Jimmy Chérizier, also known as Barbecue, a gang leader.

In addition, various human rights organizations, as well as the Harvard Law School, have published reports outlining the involvement of certain persons in the La Saline massacre. I would remind you that that massacre, which occurred on November 13, 2018, was the first massacre intended to undermine social opposition. Those reports clearly showed that Mr. Monchéry, who was director general of Jovenel Moïse's department of the interior, was behind the massacre. There was also Mr. Duplan, as well as Mr. Chérizier, who was a police officer at the time.

So the gangs were both complicit and instrumentalized. As Haitians say, that's *zo nan bouyon*.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: That's collusion.

Ms. Monique Clesca: Exactly. Perhaps not in the strictly legal sense of the term, but it's definitely that.

What we're saying is that the PHTK, which has been in power for 11 years and to which Mr. Henry belongs, is working with the gangs. There are numerous examples of that.

In the present circumstances, we can't say we're going to continue working with these people for a new Haiti or to organize elections. That's impossible. It's unthinkable.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: It's unfortunate that I don't have much time left because what you're telling us is so important. The report will help us move forward. A Canadian delegation is already on site as we speak. The government and the House of Commons must speak out.

What you're saying is important: it's not just Mr. Henry, but the entire party. I'd like you to take the 30 seconds that I have left to tell us why it isn't just Mr. Henry and who are the others that we have to be careful not to confuse with the—

Ms. Monique Clesca: Yes, it's the entire PHTK regime, which has been in power for 11 years. There was Mr. Martelly, then Jovenel Moïse and now Mr. Henry, who was chosen by Jovenel Moïse. They transformed the government into a predatory and criminal state. Some ministers have been accused of problems associated with human rights, and others have been accused of rape. They nevertheless enjoy the rank of minister.

It's a criminal and predatory state in the way it treats the Haitian people. So you have to be careful. We're surprised, we're stunned, we don't understand how Canada can continue supporting Ariel Henry and be on his side.

• (0945)

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Arnold Viersen): Thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you very much, Ms. Clesca.

I apologize to the other witnesses; Ms. Clesca was too interesting.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Arnold Viersen): Thank you.

We'll now have seven minutes from Ms. McPherson.

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you very much to all of the witnesses today.

This has been very enlightening, very interesting, and as my colleagues have mentioned before, it's extremely important for us to understand what's happening in Haiti so that we can provide whatever assistance we can.

Madame Clesca, that was very interesting testimony that you've just provided. What I started hearing from my colleague from the Bloc is that there needs to be a political response first, but we've al-

so heard from Mr. Brender that the humanitarian crisis is so pressing at the moment.

I'm struck by the fact that it looks like we will have to do many things at the same time to help Haitians as they deal with cholera, with security and with the failure of their democracy. All of that is coloured by the idea that interventions in the past and actions that have been done by the international community in the past have tainted what we do going forward.

Madame Clesca, I'd like to start with you.

I know you've met with many Haitian Canadians over the last several weeks. I know you've had an opportunity to talk to over 50 groups of Haitian Canadians. Can you tell us what the Haitian-Canadian community is asking for and what they are talking about, please?

Ms. Monique Clesca: We met with perhaps fewer than 50. We met with several. There are other groups we met with in terms of the Montana accord—not me personally—and we also met recently with the Coalition haïtienne au Canada contre la dictature en Haïti. We have met with them before, and what came through very clearly is the sentiment that everyone.... There is no dispute in terms of the crisis, in terms of the situation, the dire situation. I think from hearing all the different people, the witnesses, we are living a dire emergency. We are surviving day by day, barely surviving, if this is what it is called.

Yes, we do have different emergencies going on. The problem is, how do we resolve them?

We can no longer sit in Haiti and say, "Come and help us resolve it. You do it. You bring the boots on the ground." It can no longer work. It has not worked in the past. I think this is what I'm hearing from the compatriots in Canada that we have been speaking to.

It has not worked in the past. It has brought cholera, it has brought sexual abuse, and it has not reinforced Haitian civil society, Haitian institutions, the Haitian state. We need a different model, and what we are saying is that the model must be a transition by which we can ourselves—our sovereign selves, with our dignity—talk to Canada as two states talking to each other. We need co-operation.

We know we need the help. We know we need assistance. We have asked for assistance, but we do not want the boots coming as a result of Mr. Henry saying "Come and intervene", because some of what he could have done, he has not done. He has crossed his arms.

This is what we're saying. This is what we are hearing also from Haitian-origin Canadians, if I can say it that way.

Thank you. I hope I have responded.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you very much. You have.

I would like to ask my next question of Mr. Brender.

Mr. Brender, first of all, I want to thank you for your work and to give my condolences for the loss of Paul Farmer this year. I know he was an incredibly important person in the humanitarian sphere. My sympathy is with you.

You spoke a little about what's happening on the ground with regard to the cholera pandemic. What I'm struck with is the idea that we need to have a better way to get the cholera vaccine to communities, that we need to have long-term strategic predictable funding for local CSOs, the civil society organizations. Can you talk about Canada's response and what Canada can do with regard to procurement and humanitarian aid?

● (0950)

Mr. Mark Brender: Thank you.

One challenge in crises has always been that we respond to the immediate crisis, what's just in front of us. We lose sight of the long-term policy frameworks that got us to this place. Part of those long-term policy frameworks, in times when there's not apparent crisis.... We allow stockpiles of the cholera vaccine to dwindle to nothing. Canada can play a leadership role in times of apparent peace.

Paul had a phrase, “acute on chronic”, and that's what's happening in Haiti right now. It's very acute. It's more acute than it has ever been. The chronic situation, certainly for health and education, also ties into chronic underfunding of health for diseases that affect poor countries because of all the underlying social and economic conditions. Cholera is there because there's no water or sanitation. Part of the result of the 2010 earthquake was no investments in Haiti's public sector to be able to build long-term WASH standards within the country, which would have helped prevent cholera right now.

Despite the fact that we are in this crisis, we need to maintain a long-term perspective on policy. What is Canada doing in the humanitarian and development space that has a long-term vision?

In the 2010 earthquake, one thing that Partners In Health did was build a teaching hospital. At the time we were heavily criticized for it. People asked, “How can this be a priority in a time of crisis?” Well, when there was the Haiti earthquake last summer, the people who responded were the people who were trained at that hospital through the residency programs. It was a 100% different response from 2010. It was a response led by Haitians, in part because we made an investment in health infrastructure, training and teaching that allowed some capacity to respond.

I think it's exactly the right question to be asking. How do we not have blinders? Everything we're talking about is incredibly important—security and what the international community is going to do to respond to so many crises—but we have to do it with an eye on long-term policy that includes how we approach political leaders and what we are doing to ensure that poor countries have the capacity to respond during times of crisis.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Arnold Viersen): Thank you.

We will now have five minutes from Ms. Vandenberg.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Thank you very much.

I would like to ask Ms. Segura to pick up on something you said in terms of the multilateral foreign intervention. The reason I'm asking is that most of the witnesses, certainly the civil society wit-

nesses we've heard, have been quite vociferously opposed to having a foreign military-style intervention.

One thing we heard is that a lot of the gangs are children who've been forcibly separated from their families, put in orphanages and then recruited into gangs. The spectre, particularly if Canada were to send soldiers to this, would be Canadian soldiers face to face with armed gangs and potentially in a shooting battle with what are essentially child soldiers.

The other thing, of course, is what you said about it being better than the alternative of inaction. I think we've heard a lot of alternatives throughout the course of this study, including sanctions and stopping the arms. The oligarchs who are supporting these gangs are the ones we need to be going after. We need to stop the arms from getting in through the border, among a number of other things that we've been told, and also include capacity-building for the police, the local police.

I just wonder, given all of that, what your reasoning is for wanting to have a multilateral force.

Dr. Renata Segura: Thank you.

We are very aware of all of the difficulties that bringing a militia will bring, particularly those that you have mentioned, and the terrain where the confrontations will be. That's all certainly the case.

The truth is that the international community has supported, in the past and for many decades, processes to strengthen the national police. This is not the first time that we're talking about vetting and giving them technical expertise and training. Unfortunately, those processes take a lot of time. As we know, in some cases they don't produce the results that we need.

While we think that definitely those other policies that you mentioned are necessary, and it is true that the sanctions have had an incredible impact right away, we do think that a very carefully planned organization of troops who bring humanitarian corridors to allow for provisions to get to the community and loosen a little bit the grip that the gangs have over the communities would allow for air to come into the country too, for political processes to go forward and for a transitional government to be able to work.

We very much agree with Ms. Clesca's assessment that bringing in troops needs to be planned in very close coordination with a political agreement. It is very dangerous that the troops will be seen by Haitians as a force strengthening Henry's mandate, and that is in no way what we suggest.

● (0955)

[Translation]

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Thank you.

Do any other witnesses wish to add anything on the subject?

Ms. Monique Clesca: Yes, thank you for the opportunity.

I completely agree with Mr. Brender on the need to invest in the humanitarian aspect as well to ensure we stimulate the development process. That's why I say that it isn't a question of boots on the ground, even in security matters. It's mainly a socioeconomic problem, and Canada can provide its assistance in that area. That's also why we want programs that can help unemployed and disadvantaged young people enter the economy. They exist outside the economy. Haiti is a deeply unequal country, and these kinds of programs are necessary.

The arrival of boots on the ground in neighbourhoods won't solve the problem. It would even be dangerous because, if Canada says it's considering the possibility of sending in troops, Haitians will sit there and wait for Canada's response. It's like Mr. Henry, who waits and does nothing. However, there are things that we can do.

I say no to foreign military intervention. We said so in the Montana Accord. That's what I wanted to add.

I have one final point to make. Mr. Brender mentioned the earthquake that occurred in Haiti. International assistance did arrive, but 10 or so days later. At first, and particularly in the first 3 to 5 days, it was Haitians who intervened, and we witnessed Haitian solidarity. That's why I say that being Haitian means that we can do it. We don't have everything we need to do it, but we want to see investments in our long-term development. We want a state that doesn't attack our rights or resources. I would remind you that 50% of Haiti's population doesn't have access to health care. We need investment in that field, and the Zanmi Lasante model is promising.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Thank you.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Arnold Viersen): Thank you.

Now we have five minutes for Mr. Aboultaif.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Thank you, Chair.

Thanks again to the witnesses.

Haiti has 200 years of independence, but the situation continues to be crippling and to be deteriorating further. We've heard a big "no" to military intervention.

In the meantime, we've heard from Ms. Segura that a mandate is needed for an intervention or for outside military presence. She also spoke about detrimental colonialism, which is something that has been repeated several times.

It looks like we're in front of a solution that has to be a Haitian solution, that has to be from within the country, whether it's the church, whether it's different groups or whether it's civil society. If we're in front of that, what does that solution look like in the eyes of the witnesses?

I will ask Ms. Segura that question, and I would also appreciate having a comment from Ms. Clesca too.

• (1000)

Dr. Renata Segura: Thank you.

From the Crisis Group perspective, what is indispensable is an agreement, a national dialogue of the sort that Ms. Clesca was

proposing. We think that if there is a very defined mandate for what the troops should do and what they should not do, and if the focus is on bringing humanitarian access to the communities, only if there is a political agreement ahead of it will it be successful.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Do you believe that this mandate has been discussed at this point since Canada has announced that it's willing to intervene?

Dr. Renata Segura: No. I don't think the Haitian mandate is there yet, and without it, we would not advise sending troops.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Ms. Clesca, would you like to comment on the question?

Ms. Monique Clesca: Yesterday we met with the Canadian delegation that is in Haiti right now. They said essentially what I'm saying: We are against a military intervention in Haiti; however, we know that we need assistance. With the state of things in Haiti right now, we cannot have any kind of long-term assistance being negotiated. Practically everything is at a standstill.

We have been advocating the accord of August 30 for a larger consensus. To us, a larger consensus means, as I mentioned, talking to the different church denominations and the private sector. We've had over 20 meetings with different elements of the private sector, with the different groups, etc.

Also, in terms of the diaspora—Haitian Canadians, Haitian Americans, Haitian French—we have had meetings with them. They are part of the accord, but we are also reaching out so there can be more who are part of it.

We believe that we need to broaden the consensus. We also have a road map. We have gone a little bit further in terms of the road map with elections, *la conférence nationale*, humanitarian assistance, security assistance and *redressement économique*. We believe these are important things to move forward with immediately.

We are, I believe, very clear that this is what we are looking for—a larger consensus, a transition of two years, and that we negotiate with Monsieur Henry how and when he will leave. He is no longer part of the solution. In fact, he is part of the problem with lots of the things that are going on with the gangs today.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Thank you. That's a great road map.

What's left for Canada to do, for example, in this whole picture? Is it a direct financial contribution? What is it? How do you see Canada's role, specifically, in being most effective?

Ms. Monique Clesca: Canada has been and will continue to be an important partner of Haiti, I think.

For example, in the area of gender, one of the big issues on the table is sexual violence with the gangs, and in general in Haiti. I think Canada has been a leader in that area, not only recently but for a long time. Canada has set the model in terms of that, and I think that ought to certainly continue. Linked with that also is a lot of early sexual debuting. This also brings about one of the human rights violations—a lot of forced teenage pregnancies. I think all of that is part of the package.

Another area, in terms of security—

The Chair: Thank you. My apologies. We have reached the time limit for this.

Ms. Monique Clesca: I'm sorry. Can I finish my phrase?

The Chair: Yes. Go ahead, please. Finish it.

Ms. Monique Clesca: Canada, France and the United States are major donors in terms of security. I believe that Canada could play a leadership role in that. Each works independently. Why not have a partner in terms of security? Canada can actually play a leadership role in that, as it did—

• (1005)

The Chair: Thank you. We need to continue. There is strict timing.

Ms. Monique Clesca: Okay. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, you have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

This study is so important for us as we go forward.

Ms. Clesca, as you said, Canada, the United States and various other foreign powers have intervened in Haiti for years, with the results that we can see today.

You told us you are absolutely opposed to military interference. However, many witnesses have told us that the police and security forces in Haiti must be helped. How do we do that? How can we help the various security forces in Haiti to maintain security without intervening militarily?

Ms. Monique Clesca: I think there's a major difference among the possible scenarios. On the one hand, Mr. Henry is requesting military intervention and wants to see troops landing and intervening in Haiti. On the other hand, there could be a transitional government, in which case we would sit down together to determine what our security needs are, needs that the police would define.

As I said, we want the national police to be reinforced; we want technical, financial, technological and logistical assistance, but that has to be defined with a government that's legitimate, a transitional government, to enable us to go forward. Mr. Henry no longer has any legitimacy. The government there is working with gangs and other groups. What can we do now? That's the problem.

Our position on this is clear: Mr. Henry can't do it. Our future can't play out like that. Yes, we want assistance, but it has to be defined under a cooperative framework.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I definitely understand that it has to be done without Mr. Henry. I think that's quite clear.

However, as you said earlier, there are corruption issues. Are 100% of Haitian police force members pure as the driven snow? Perhaps there's a problem that has to be solved even before we help the security forces.

Or do you think that, since we're in the midst of an emergency, no one will look at that later?

Ms. Monique Clesca: I think the police have officers who are very well trained, have extensive experience and could definitely provide a better answer to that question than I can.

From what I've read and heard during discussions we've had with security experts, there are definitely problems with the police. For example, there are staffing problems. Many police officers have recently been killed or assassinated. Some have also left the force. Police officers are very poorly paid, whereas they put their lives in danger.

As I said in my statement, some police officers are also involved in the gangs. Some of them have been arrested. So audits have to be done. It's also been suggested to us that police uniforms should perhaps be changed.

Yes, there are problems; we are aware of them, and, yes, we need assistance. However, the solution isn't for you to come in with your troops in an interventionist manner.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: We absolutely agree on that point.

It's just that I don't have a lot of time, and I'm trying to be as pragmatic as possible. I know that the committee's excellent analysts, who will help us draft our report, are working very intelligently and pragmatically as well.

I think it's been quite clear from the start: you're telling us you don't want direct military intervention. Instead you want material assistance for your security forces.

Now, if there are corrupt members among your security forces, or members who aren't entirely clean, what comes first, the chicken or the egg? Do you understand my question? It's important. Where do we start? Do we immediately provide direct material assistance to your police forces before resolving the corruption issues, or do we first solve the corruption problems and then assist the police forces?

We'll have to prepare recommendations at some point, which is precisely why I'm asking you the question.

Other witnesses may also want to answer that question.

• (1010)

Ms. Monique Clesca: I'll answer it briefly to give the other witnesses a chance to respond.

Security experts have told us that two things will have to be done. First, there will have to be an audit process. I discussed that earlier. I assume that has already started. We will also have to depoliticize the police. That was a basic feature of the Jovenel Moïse regime. We now have a new director, Mr. Elbe. I can't tell you what he's doing, but we feel there's less politicization, although there may still be some. This is something that's important.

When we talk about technical assistance, we aren't referring solely to equipment. It can also include men and women who provide training or their assistance. We're open to that.

What I'm saying is that this will have to be defined in an agreement between legitimate states.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Clesca.

[*English*]

We'll have Madam McPherson for five minutes.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you very much.

I just want to take a moment. I noticed that some of the other witnesses were interested in speaking to that last point. Mr. Da Rin, I believe you had your hand up.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Diego Da Rin (Consultant, Latin America and the Caribbean, International Crisis Group): Good morning.

To add to what Ms. Clesca said, I would say there are essentially three problems associated with the Police nationale d'Haïti.

First, there's a personnel shortage. We currently have approximately 13,000 active officers, but, according to the calculations of various military experts, at least half are colluding with gangs. However, some special units have already been trained and subjected to a rigorous security control process. One of them is the recent UTAG, the temporary anti-gang unit, which could conduct operations jointly with international troops that would potentially intervene.

There's another essential element. Along with potential outside intervention, we have to reinforce, control and train special units and, more generally, the police as a whole. There are also preliminary steps to physical intervention that are extremely important to bear in mind. Many people who live in gang-controlled areas have told me that gang leaders are afraid of foreign armed intervention. There was a sharp decline in the number of gang wars in various areas in the weeks following Prime Minister Henry's call for intervention.

Lastly, we should set up adapted camps for displaced persons by providing the necessary infrastructure to house the thousands of additional persons who would leave those areas. You should know that there are already approximately 100,000 displaced persons in the metropolitan Port-au-Prince area. We should also prepare PNH quotas, which would be subjected to rigorous control, to support and, in a way, direct operations in those areas. Many people tell me that, as soon as images circulate showing that troops and support have arrived and that there's an imminent threat of physical intervention, negotiations should be started with certain leaders, who would then be prepared to negotiate.

[*English*]

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you very much for that.

I'm going to stay with the International Crisis Group. I'd like to get a better understanding about the gender-based violence and how Canada can help with regard to the gender-based violence we're seeing on the ground.

I would ask either Mr. Da Rin or Madam Segura for that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Diego Da Rin: Thank you for your question.

To attract the support of the local population, the gangs normally try somehow to protect the population that was in their area. Over the past year, however, there was less and less consideration for the public during gang wars, especially in the unprecedented confrontations that occurred from May to July of this year. Members of the public, especially women, were gang raped in front of their families. Those acts were filmed and posted to social media to ensure a kind of control over the population in the areas of opposing gangs.

To address this problem, we need to control completely the areas that the police have been unable to enter for months, or even years, or at least to lower the high level of violence currently observed against women, men, girls and boys.

• (1015)

[*English*]

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you very much.

Would any other witnesses like to speak to the gender-based violence that we're seeing in Haiti?

I know I only have a few moments left. Ms. Clesca, would you comment?

The Chair: Please answer within 30 seconds.

Ms. Monique Clesca: I'd say that it is also a structural problem. I don't like the term, but gender-based violence is a problem in Haiti. It is a patriarchal society. We need much more work in terms of changing social norms to deal with gender-based violence. It is not a question of control of troops, etc. No.

Yes, the gangs have made the bodies of women war territory, but we have to be real and say that gender-based violence.... I can't say it's endemic in Haiti, but it is a huge social problem that needs a lot of work and a reformatting of the way we actually bring up our children.

This is a long-time investment, and Canada has been involved with that. We need more support.

The Chair: Thank you.

On that sombre note, we're going to conclude our testimony on Haiti.

Thank you to all of the witnesses. Thank you for being here in person, Madame Clesca and Mr. Brender. Thank you for participating by Zoom, Monsieur Jean, Mrs. Segura, Mr. Da Rin and Pastor Duré.

We are now going into a closed session. We ask those online to change your Zoom links as swiftly as possible.

Again, thank you to all of the witnesses for being here. Please watch the committee. We will likely be producing a statement on this issue, which we invite you to see if and when we produce it. Thank you so much.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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