

Investigation into the gang armed confrontations in Cité-Soleil, Croix-des-Bouquets and Tabarre

April - May 2022

Executive Summary

- 1- Between 24 April and 16 May 2022, an unprecedented wave of violence linked to turf wars between heavily armed gangs erupted in several communes in the north and west of the Port-au-Prince metropolitan area, including Cité Soleil, Croix-des-Bouquets and Tabarre. Even though Port-au-Prince has seen a sharp increase in armed violence since 2018, the toll of the latest clashes that took place in these communes was extremely heavy and has rarely been documented in the country's recent history, over such a short period of time.
- 2- According to information gathered by the United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH), in less than three weeks, more than 226 residents were killed, injured or disappeared (201 men, 14 women and 11 children). Dozens of cases of sexual violence were also reported. In addition, at least 96 gang members were killed or wounded. Also, nearly 16,000 people were forced to flee their homes to take refuge in makeshift sites or in the home of relatives.
- 3- Armed with assault rifles, but also with machetes and gas cans, gangs spared no one. Women and children as young as one year old were executed in their homes and their bodies were burned. Young boys in their teens, accused of providing information to rival gangs, were shot in public places. Similarly, women and children, some of whom were less than 10 years old, were raped collectively, in their homes or in their neighborhoods. Gangs used rape as a weapon to terrorize and take revenge on the local populations.
- 4- The criminal groups responsible for these acts of violence are well known. These are the gangs identified as "Chen Mechan" and "400 Mawozo," and their respective allies, the "G9 in Family and Allies" (hereinafter, "G-9") and the "G-Pèp. The leaders of these gangs are also widely known. Alliances between gangs allowed them to coordinate simultaneous attacks in several neighborhoods and to maintain their operations over a period of three weeks, with a few days of respite.
- 5- These alliances are not new, as they consolidated as a tool of paramount importance during the administration of President Jovenel Moïse in the struggle for political influence. The recent armed confrontations reported in Cité Soleil, Croix-des-Bouquets and Tabarre illustrate that these struggles are still ongoing and that have even intensified with the probable involvement of political and economic actors, and even former police officers, already at work at the time.
- 6- In this context, despite its rapid response, the Haitian National Police (HNP) encountered significant difficulties in re-establishing public order in the areas affected by the armed violence.
- 7- A dozen specialized police units were deployed in the first days of the confrontations. However, given the very high level of armament among the gangs, the HNP had no option but to adopt a reactive posture to counter the armed violence, notably due to a lack of operational and logistical means, but also due to an apparent lack of support among the population living in the affected areas.
- 8- In addition, the judicial police promptly opened investigations into the abuses committed against the population. In this regard, investigators from the Central Directorate of the Judicial Police and

the Departmental Service of the Judicial Police have already begun collecting complaints and testimonies from victims.

- 9- By contrast, as of the date of publication of this report, the judges of the courts in which these acts of violence took place had taken very few steps to apprehend the perpetrators. This risks slowing down the work of the justice system and, above all, anticipates that these mass crimes, like many others committed in recent years, are likely to go unpunished.
- 10- In addition to the challenges related to access to justice, victims, particularly victims of sexual violence, have not been able to benefit from adequate responses in terms of health care, mental health or socio-economic reintegration, particularly because of the insufficiency of care services, as well as structural barriers related to stigmatization and discrimination.
- 11- This cycle of violence must absolutely be stopped and actions to fight against this impunity and restore the rights of the victims must be taken as soon as possible. The Haitian people can no longer bear this situation. Therefore, BINUH proposes the following recommendations:

To the Haitian National Police:

- ✓ Support and coordinate the different judicial police services so that they can carry out, as quickly as possible, their investigations into the abuses committed against the local population and identify the perpetrators, including those who have provided support in the form of arms, ammunition, advice and any other type of support to the gangs.
- ✓ Execute the arrest warrants issued against the gang leaders involved in these acts of violence.
- ✓ Strengthen its staff and capacities to effectively maintain public order and protect the population.
- ✓ Strengthen its internal control mechanisms to identify and sanction misconduct by its staff.

To the justice system :

- ✓ Open judicial investigations as soon as possible into the abuses committed during the gang confrontations in the areas affected areas.
- ✓ Support magistrates to complete their investigations, and provide the necessary means to the courts and tribunals to ensure that the perpetrators of these crimes are apprehended and tried.
- ✓ Relocate the Port-au-Prince court and the Public Prosecutor's Office to a secure area of the capital, in order to allow the different actors of the judicial system to resume their activities as soon as possible.
- ✓ Consider the establishment of a specialized judicial pole within the Haitian courts and tribunals, in collaboration with the different judicial sectors, in order to fight against crimes committed by gangs, including those involving sexual violence.
- ✓ Ensure the provision of legal assistance and the establishment of an appropriate witness and victim protection mechanism.

To the authorities responsible for providing support to victims, especially victims of sexual violence:

- ✓ Strengthen and coordinate emergency care services for victims of sexual violence and their families, including health care and psychosocial and psychological support.
- ✓ Provide adequate assistance to displaced populations, especially the most vulnerable, to facilitate their sustainable resettlement.