



Security Council

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Letter dated 12 October 2023 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to transmit to the members of the Security Council the first quarterly report of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime pursuant to paragraph 9 of Security Council resolution [2692 \(2023\)](#). The report provides information on sources and routes of illicit arms and financial flows and on relevant United Nations activities and recommendations.

(Signed) António **Guterres**



Report of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime pursuant to paragraph 9 of Security Council resolution 2692 (2023)

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 9 of Security Council resolution 2692 (2023), in which the Council tasked the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) with reporting to the Council every three months, concurrent with the reporting cycle of the United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH), through the Secretary-General, on sources and routes of illicit arms and financial flows, relevant United Nations activities and recommendations.

2. The report begins with an overview of the context in which trafficking in firearms and ammunition occurs and the arms control framework in Haiti. The second section includes information on some of the sources, modus operandi and routes used to traffic weapons and ammunitions. The third section provides insights related to illicit financial flows.

3. Given the dynamic nature of trafficking in Haiti, the results of any attempt to document trends will be fragmented and partial. Even so, certain tendencies and patterns can be discerned. The present report draws on research by UNODC presented in its briefing note entitled “Haiti’s criminal markets: mapping trends in firearms and drug trafficking” issued on 2 March 2023,¹ which provided an overview of the scope, scale and dynamics of firearms and drug trafficking in Haiti, including sources, routes, vectors and destinations. As with that previous assessment, the present report is based on published and unpublished information and interviews conducted by UNODC.

Background

4. Following his visit to Port-au-Prince on 1 July 2023, the Secretary-General underscored that “brutal gangs have a stranglehold on the people of Haiti. Port-au-Prince is encircled by armed groups that are blocking roads, controlling access to food and health care, and undermining humanitarian support. Predatory gangs are using kidnappings and sexual violence as weapons to terrorize entire communities”.² He appealed for concurrent action in three essential areas: to address the urgent humanitarian needs; to tackle urgent security needs; and for all social and political actors to accelerate their efforts towards a desperately needed political solution.³

5. Increasingly powerful criminal armed groups have effectively seized control of large swathes of the country, contributing to a deepening humanitarian crisis. A recent assessment by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimated that 194,624 Haitians have been physically displaced by insecurity in the country.⁴ Chronic instability is contributing to rising food prices, surging hunger, dangerous cholera outbreaks, deepening poverty and the potential for a major migration exodus.⁵ According to a briefing note dated 18 August 2023 by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) 1,615 persons died because of

¹ UNODC, “Haiti’s criminal markets: mapping trends in firearms and drug trafficking” (2023). Available at www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/toc/Haiti_assessment_UNODC.pdf.

² See Secretary-General’s press encounter, 6 July 2023. Available at www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/press-encounter/2023-07-06/secretary-generals-press-encounter-visits-haiti-and-trinidad-and-tobago-and-the-situation-the-middle-east.

³ Ibid.

⁴ See IOM, Information sheet on forced displacement for the period June–August 2022. Available at <https://dtm.iom.int/haiti> (accessed 2 October 2023).

⁵ United Nations News, “‘Catastrophic’ hunger recorded in Haiti for first time, UN warns”, 14 October 2022.

violence in 2021, 2,183 in 2022 and from the beginning of the year to 15 August 2023, at least 2,439 Haitians had been killed, 902 injured and 951 kidnapped.⁶

6. According to the United States Department of the Treasury, several members of Haiti's economic and political elite are suspected of involvement in criminal enterprises, including influential Haitian families and members of the diaspora in the United States of America and the Dominican Republic.⁷ Haiti is in fact the most unequal country in Latin America and the Caribbean: the richest 20 per cent of its population holds more than 64 per cent of its total wealth, while the poorest 20 per cent hold hardly 1 per cent.⁸ As a result of the insecurity and lack of capacity, individuals who are involved in industrial parks, warehousing, imports and exports and the shipping industry⁹ have encountered limited oversight from government authorities. Some of these individuals have been designated by the United States, Canada or the Dominican Republic. The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the European Union have introduced restrictive measures for individuals and entities responsible for threatening the peace, security or stability of Haiti or for undermining democracy or the rule of law in Haiti. Furthermore, in its resolution 2653 (2022), the Security Council demanded the immediate cessation of violence, criminal activities and human rights abuses, which undermined the peace, stability and security of Haiti and the region. It decided that a travel ban and asset freeze should be implemented for individuals or entities designated for such measures by the Committee established pursuant to paragraph 19 of the resolution as responsible for or complicit in, or having engaged in, directly or indirectly, actions that threatened the peace, security, or stability of Haiti. The Council further decided to establish a targeted arms embargo and recently allowed a multinational security support mission to cooperate with BINUH and relevant United Nations agencies, including but not limited to UNODC and OHCHR, to support the efforts of the Haitian National Police to re-establish security in Haiti, including efforts by the Haitian National Police to combat illicit trafficking and diversion of arms and related materiel and to enhance management and control of Haiti's borders and ports.

7. The evolution, expansion and intensification of gang activity across Haiti is of concern.¹⁰ Many of the country's estimated 150 to 200 gangs are deeply enmeshed in complex patronage networks aligned with a constellation of political and economic elites. A small number of gang federations in and around the capital are expanding their territorial influence over urban neighbourhoods and targeting critical infrastructure, including seaports, fuel terminals, airports, grain stores, warehouses, customs offices and key roads in and out of major cities.¹¹ In 2022, gangs blocked access to fuel reserves during several months, triggering a humanitarian catastrophe according to the World Food Programme (WFP).¹² In the absence of an international security mission or equivalent, the practical focus of international support is on delivering

⁶ OHCHR, "Haiti: deaths and injuries among gang violence", press briefing note, 18 August 2023. Available at www.ohchr.org/en/press-briefing-notes/2023/08/haiti-deaths-and-injuries-amid-gang-violence.

⁷ Canada, "Canada imposes sanctions against Haitian economic elites", 5 December 2022; and United States Department of the Treasury, "U.S. sanctions additional corrupt Haitian politicians for drug trafficking", 2 December 2022. See also Renata Segura, "Haiti's state of paralysis", *Foreign Affairs*, 20 April 2022.

⁸ World Bank, "Living conditions in Haiti's capital improve, but rural communities remain very poor", 11 July 2014.

⁹ UNODC, "Haiti's criminal markets".

¹⁰ UNODC, "Haiti's criminal markets". See also Security Council resolution 2653 (2022) and Jérémy Cotton, Mark Hammel and Luna Nofoory, "Haiti fragility brief" (Ottawa, Carleton University, 2023).

¹¹ See Global Initiative on Transnational Organized Crime, "Gangs of Haiti".

¹² WFP, "Catastrophic hunger levels recorded for the first time in Haiti", 14 October 2022.

humanitarian aid and bolstering the capacities of the Haitian National Police to deter and suppress armed gangs, including with regard to the trafficking of firearms.¹³

8. The access that armed groups enjoy to a wide variety of illicit sources for arms and ammunition contributes to the crisis. This traffic has regional consequences and if unattended could lead to further national and regional spill-over and insecurity.

9. Firearms and ammunition are regularly seized along Haiti's borders and in cities like Port-au-Prince, Cap-Haïtien, Belladère, Malpasse, Gonaïves and Port-de-Paix. However, limited maritime control capacities, personnel and equipment, coupled with a lack of border surveillance and patrol infrastructure, have hampered efforts to stem the influx of illicit weapons, leading to an alarming increase in gang-related access to weapons and ammunition.

10. Haiti's porous land and sea borders pose significant challenges for its national authorities. In Haiti, these agencies are increasingly targeted by criminal gangs while facing severe staffing and resource shortages, as well as a technical capacity deficit. The Haitian border police responsible for preventing cross-border trafficking is particularly affected by a lack of resources and personnel. The country's numerous public and private ports, irregular roads and clandestine airstrips are poorly monitored and infrequently patrolled, exacerbating the ease with which firearms and drug shipments can enter Haiti.

11. At the time of writing, the Port Lafito, Saint Marc and Belladère border customs offices and the Ganthier Road control post are often inoperative owing to insecurity in the vicinity. Other border control points are reported as being operational.

12. Owing to mounting concerns about crime and insecurity, private security companies have expanded across Haiti. Many provide close protection services for the country's political and economic elite and protection of public facilities, critical infrastructure and small and medium-sized businesses. Significant numbers of such companies also recruit directly from the Haitian National Police, with officers either moonlighting or leaving law enforcement altogether to work in the more lucrative private sector. Some of these entities have been implicated in firearms trafficking. The growth of private security in Haiti coincides with similar patterns of private security expansion across Latin America and the Caribbean,¹⁴ alongside a deepening security crisis following the 2010 earthquake¹⁵ and in particular since the departure of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti in 2017.

13. In 2022, as the security situation deteriorated, the emergence of neighbourhood "self-defence" groups was observed. The population, in an effort to prevent gangs from taking over their communities, resorted to violent acts, including the public lynching and immolation of gang members. Mob movements have been observed in 8 of the 10 departments of Haiti, including the "Bwa Kale" self-defence movement.¹⁶

¹³ UNODC, "Haiti's criminal markets".

¹⁴ See Regional Centre for Peace, Disarmament and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean and Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance, "Armed private security in Latin America and the Caribbean: oversight and accountability in an evolving context" (October, 2016).

¹⁵ Geoff Burt, "From private security to public good: regulating the private security industry in Haiti", security sector reform issue paper No. 9 (Centre for International Governance Innovation, June 2016).

¹⁶ BINUH, "Human rights situation: main trends", quarterly report, April–June 2023.

Arms control framework

14. Beyond the lack of operational capacity to control borders, the legal framework for arms control dates from the late 1980s and does not allow for an effective response to the current challenges.¹⁷

15. The Haitian Armed Forces were responsible for controlling arms and ammunition in the country, but they were disbanded in 1995, and the relevant decree governing arms and ammunition was updated only recently to account for the fact that the Armed Forces were no longer in a position to maintain a monopoly on weapons or ammunition or provide authorization for the purchase of firearms and ammunition. Haitian authorities are revising the legislation and a draft law is currently being finalized. A dedicated thematic working group of the inter-institutional and interministerial Task Force on Disarmament, Dismantlement and Reintegration and Community Violence Reduction, which brings together representatives from the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of the Interior, the National Commission for Disarmament, Dismantlement and Reintegration, the customs authorities and the police, is finalizing the revision of the draft law on weapons and ammunition with support from BINUH, the United Nations Development Programme and the Regional Centre for Peace, Disarmament and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean.

16. Haiti is a signatory of the Inter-American Convention against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives, and other related Materials of 1997. Under its article XIII, the Convention obliges States members of the Organization of American States to assist each other in the exchange of information for the prosecution of offenders and traffickers.

17. In 2023, the Government of Haiti signed a national action plan to address illegal firearms in the country, which is in line with the Road Map for Implementing the Caribbean Priority Actions on the Illicit Proliferation of Firearms and Ammunition across the Caribbean in a Sustainable Manner by 2030. The adoption of the revised legislation and its implementation, as well as the implementation of the national action plan, would demonstrate positive steps towards building adequate capacities in weapons and ammunition management.

18. With support from international partners, since its establishment the Haitian National Police has developed processes and mechanisms by which to manage their weapons and ammunition, including with regard to accounting, physical security, stockpile management and disposal. Nevertheless, the current security crisis and the continuous state of emergency under which the police operate undermine its weapon and ammunition management capacities.

¹⁷ Under the 1988 decree, the Haitian Armed Forces have a monopoly on the manufacture, import, export, use and possession of weapons of war, ammunition and war materiel. They are also responsible for controlling all firearms, corresponding ammunition and all destructive devices found on the national territory. The 1989 amended decree further specifies that those wishing to import, buy or sell firearms, ammunition and explosives must be in possession of an authorization issued by the high command of the Armed Forces of Haiti. Furthermore, article 16 of the decree establishes sanctions to be taken against traffickers, specifying that violators shall be subject to the following penalties:

- (a) Imprisonment for up to three years and a fine of 5,000 gourdes for handguns, air rifles and revolvers;
- (b) Imprisonment for up to five years and a fine of 10,000 gourdes for long guns or rifles and corresponding ammunition;
- (c) Imprisonment for up to 10 years and a fine of 75,000 gourdes for automatic weapons and corresponding ammunition;
- (d) Imprisonment of up to 15 years and a fine of 125,000 gourdes for the possession of destructive devices, as well as the importation and sale of weapons of all types and all categories.

II. Trafficking in and diversion of arms

A. Sources of illicit arms and ammunition

Weapons and ammunition trafficking

19. Sophisticated and higher-calibre firearms and ammunition are being trafficked into Haiti amid an unprecedented and rapidly deteriorating security situation.

20. Haiti does not manufacture firearms or ammunition. Most of the firearms and ammunition present in the country have been brought into the country by illegal means, although some calibres of firearms and ammunition are transferred lawfully to public and private authorities through licensed dealers and authorized transactions. In Haiti, firearms and ammunition can only be legally imported if they meet the criteria specified in section 12 of the decrees governing the import, purchase and sales of firearms. Weak oversight and arms control mechanisms mean that weapons and ammunitions imported legally are periodically diverted and recirculated into civilian markets.¹⁸

21. The movement of ammunition into Haiti is also of concern and, unlike firearms, there is very little domestic regulation on the shipping and movement of ammunition. Legally, there is no clearly defined number of rounds that would constitute trafficking. According to the decrees governing firearms, a private person in Haiti is allowed to carry a certain number of rounds for personal use, but this figure is not quantified. Ammunition can only be sold legally by licensed sellers of firearms. There is no limit on how many rounds can be sold, with sellers setting their own limits. Sellers are required to verify the identification of buyers and keep records of purchases. For example, a private citizen with the correct paperwork transporting 210 rounds¹⁹ of 7.62 x 39 mm ammunition, could claim personal use to avoid being charged with smuggling offences, but could be charged with smuggling if the paperwork is not in order. Consultation with experts confirm that the same person with the correct paperwork and transporting 1,000 rounds of 7.62 ammunition would likely be charged with trafficking, as 1,000 rounds would be deemed beyond a reasonable and common-sense definition of personal use. Investigations into ammunition trafficking cases may examine multiple factors, depending on a subjective assessment of the investigator to determine if the seized rounds are for personal use or are being trafficked.

22. Such limitations do not apply to certain personnel of international organizations or the diplomatic corps (for example, security guards or diplomatic close protection officers), or to officials of the Government of Haiti, as they are required to maintain a level of competence with weapons and move large numbers of rounds for firearm practice and give training. Nor does it apply to personnel licensed by competent authorities in the execution of their official duties. In addition, the legislation allows for the legitimate sale of firearms and ammunition under licence for citizens' use in recreational hunting and, in some cases, the protection of life and property. These licences are often accompanied by storage, carriage, concealment and use conditions. The legislation makes it a criminal offense to be in possession of an unlicensed firearm or ammunition. According to the decrees governing firearms, the exemptions relating to international organizations, the diplomatic corps or Haitian government officials can be rescinded if it is found that persons in these organizations are committing crimes with the weapons or ammunition by selling or making available ammunition and/or weapons for violence and/or crime.

¹⁸ UNODC, "Haiti's criminal markets".

¹⁹ This is an example of a reasonably large amount of ammunition that is deemed acceptable for personal use.

23. Due to mounting concerns about crime and insecurity, private security companies have expanded across Haiti in recent decades. According to the current legal framework,²⁰ private security companies are permitted to legally acquire and register a certain number of firearms in Haiti, depending on their needs and authorization. Analysts believe, however, that local private security companies oversee a far larger arsenal than what is legally permitted.

24. In terms of the number of weapons in circulation Haiti, according to a 2020 report from the National Commission for Disarmament, Dismantlement and Reintegration, it is estimated that there could be as many as 500,000 small arms in the country²¹ with the majority of these believed to be illegal. Only 38,000 legal firearms have been registered. Haiti's law enforcement officers frequently find themselves less well armed than private security personnel, armed gangs and many Haitian residents. It is likely that the number of unregistered firearms has significantly increased since the publication of the Commission's 2020 report.

25. The total number of weapons and ammunition currently in circulation and seized in Haiti remains difficult to determine as relevant authorities do not have the capacity to comprehensively collect and collate data and conduct traces on circulating and seized firearms and ammunition. However, the report on seizures of firearms and ammunition prepared by the Customs Inspection Directorate of the General Customs Administration and statistics on seizures and crime in Haiti collected by United Nations police in collaboration with the Directorate of Judicial Police show that some work is being done to attempt to track seizures and provide information on trafficking routes.

Trends and developments

26. Although data is limited, it is assessed that there has been a surge in weapons trafficking since 2021, exacerbated by ongoing crises in 2022 and 2023, much of which is linked to gang-related activities. There is a significant disparity between the volume of arms and ammunition in the hands of gangs and criminal groups, due mainly to incomplete seizure figures and registrations. Data sets are limited, but there is a low volume of reported weapons and ammunition seizures. The problem is compounded by multiple organizations seizing weapons and reporting through separate channels.

27. Current trends indicate an increase in the trafficking of small arms and light weapons, often linked to organized crime networks and gangs. Specifically, the largest share of firearms intercepted by the Haitian authorities during the reporting period appear to be pistols, rifles and home-made weapons, including pipe guns, followed by revolvers and shotguns. Higher-powered rifles (5.56 mm and 7.62 x 39 mm) such as AK-pattern and AR-15-pattern rifles and AR-15s are typically in higher demand from gangs.²²

B. Illicit arms trafficking routes

28. Data received by UNODC from the Central Criminal Investigation Department of the Haitian National Police, the Customs Inspection Department and United Nations police, although confirmed, remains incomplete. The trends and routes described below represent only a partial examination of the reality, which requires a more in-depth analysis, additional sources of information and cross-referencing. The

²⁰ Section 14 of decree of 23 May 1989 amending certain articles of the decree of 12 January 1988.

²¹ National Commission for Disarmament, Dismantlement and Reintegration, national strategy for disarmament, dismantlement and reintegration, and reduction of community violence in Haiti, 2021–2024 (2020).

²² Information provided by United Nations police.

data currently available is insufficient to present the full complexity and organization of arms and ammunitions trafficking networks. The few examples cited below illustrate the most important routes, based on confirmed cases and seizures for which UNODC has received information.

29. Multiple reports from the United States Drug Enforcement Administration and Immigration and Customs Enforcement highlight that a significant portion of the weapons and their parts and components and ammunition trafficked into Haiti come through diaspora networks and brokers and other intermediaries. Networks of criminal actors, including members of the Haitian diaspora, source and traffic firearms from across the United States through third-party (“straw man”) purchases.²³ It is understood that corruption plays a role in facilitating transportation while avoiding the vigilance of the authorities.

30. Firearms and ammunition trafficked to and in Haiti are primarily shipped from the United States, principally through Florida, although in some cases weapons and ammunition are trafficked through intermediaries in the Dominican Republic²⁴ (where ammunition also arrives from New York, United States) or Jamaica.²⁵

31. Ultimately, weapons and ammunition arrive by sea in Port-au-Prince, in one of the city’s various ports or docks, in areas controlled mainly by gangs. They can also be directly brought from secondary ports, using national roads under the control of gangs.²⁶

32. Once in Haiti, firearms and ammunition are offloaded and passed to end users through a host of intermediaries, including corrupt officials, political and economic elites and gangs. Weapons and ammunition are smuggled locally from and to several small ports with undeclared cargo, including the National Port Authority port, Port Lafito, Cima, Moulins d’Haïti, Gonaïves, Saint-Marc, Cap-Haïtien, Port-de-Paix, Miragoâne, Jérémie, Jacmel and Les Cayes. Small private ports and private coastal properties are also used.²⁷

33. In ports, seizures of firearms and ammunition are frequently the result of containers being inspected at the point of origin in the United States, while transiting the Caribbean or docked in Haiti’s private and public ports, predominantly in Port-au-Prince and Port-de-Paix. It is understood that a limited number of companies and private interests with access to ports and transport logistics are said to be implicated in weapons and firearms trafficking.

34. At the land border with the Dominican Republic (Ouanaminthe, Belladère, Ganthier (Malpasse), Anse-à Pitres),²⁸ firearms and ammunition are also carried by individuals in shipments of personal effects. Official reports on seizures in both Haiti and the Dominican Republic suggest that the same routes are also exploited for other types of illicit activities, including drug trafficking and cash smuggling.²⁹ Haiti also

²³ UNODC, “Haiti’s criminal markets”.

²⁴ See United States Department of Justice, “Firearms trafficker attempts to smuggle guns to Haiti”, 29 September 2020.

²⁵ UNODC, “Haiti’s criminal markets”.

²⁶ Interview with key informant K11.

²⁷ There are three ports within the Port-au-Prince arrondissement, which handle the majority of cargo arriving into Haiti: the National Port Authority, the Varreux terminal and Port Lafito. Cap-Haïtien on the north coast is also an important importation port. There are two dedicated fuel terminals at the Varreux terminal and at Thor, both close to Port-au-Prince. The Abraham terminal and the Moulins d’Haïti port are equipped to import bulk grain. A variety of smaller ports are used for local shipments, and some of them (Gonaïves, Saint-Marc and Jacmel) also handle international short-sea shipments.

²⁸ UNODC, “Haiti’s criminal markets”.

²⁹ On 27 August 2023, 24 sacks containing 119 packages of marijuana, weighing approximately 1,198 lbs, were seized, along with \$11,600 dollars.

serves as a transit country for drugs, mainly cocaine and cannabis, which enter through public, private and informal ports in the south of the country (Côtes-de-Fer, Jacmel), as well as clandestine runways, before being shipped onwards to the United States, the Dominican Republic and Western Europe. The exchange of firearms for drugs is a common practice between criminal organizations in Haiti and Jamaica.³⁰

35. In March 2021, the Ministry of Economy and Finance issued a memorandum aimed at addressing the illegal entry of firearms and ammunition into national territory. The memorandum introduced specific measures to govern the importation of personal effects. Specifically, it:

(a) Prohibits customs clearance of personal effects in ports other than Port-au-Prince and Cap-Haïtien;

(b) Requires carriers and managers of bonded warehouses to unload containers of personal effects for inspection and verification;

(c) Informs shipping agents and other operators that it is strictly forbidden for importers of vehicles (cars, trucks and other vehicles) to transport packages on board the vehicles;

(d) Requests that packages of personal effects be checked, in any authorized office, in the presence of a visiting inspector, a supervisory officer and the consignee or customs agent personally.

36. The announcement of this memorandum led to major protests, particularly in the town of Saint-Marc, as protesters argued that personal effects should be allowed to arrive by sea in small coastal towns and not just in major ports.³¹

37. Regarding accessibility and affordability, it is understood that the price of weapons has increased by up to sixfold (including for shotguns and 5.56 mm and 7.62 x 39 mm rifles). The large profit margins have led to an increase in the number of illegal dealers, some of whom enjoy effective immunity from investigation and prosecution owing to their occupation.³²

38. In recent years, gangs have grown in number and their structures have evolved. There are two major federations of gangs operating in downtown Port-au-Prince, identified as G9 and G-Pèp; other gangs are affiliated with one or the other. Each gang or group of gangs uses dedicated resources and suppliers, but also extend mutual support when needed (within the group or to affiliated gangs).

39. Other notable groups operate in Port-au-Prince. They include the Kraze Baryè and 400 Mawozo groups. In Tabarre, in the eastern part of the capital, Kraze Baryè operate in the vicinity of the police academy and the United States embassy. The 400 Mawozo group controls the road to the Dominican Republic, in particular the border post at Ganthier. In the Artibonite region, the Kokorat San Ras group is very active. These gangs take part in, and benefit from, arms and munitions trafficking.³³

40. Regarding the routes employed to traffic illicit commodities, four routes have been identified for the purposes of the present report. This analysis is based on interviews, official reports provided to UNODC, mainly the report of the Customs Inspection Directorate on seizures of arms and munitions for the period from July

³⁰ Global Organized Crime Index 2023. Available at <https://ocindex.net/country/haiti> (accessed 29 September 2023).

³¹ See AlterPresse, “Haïti: Mouvement de protestations à Saint-Marc contre l’interdiction de dédouaner des effets personnels au port de cette ville”, 6 January 2022. Available at www.alterpresse.org/spip.php?article27854.

³² Interview with key informant KI2 (August 2023).

³³ Scott Mistler-Ferguson, “G9 vs. G-PEP: the two gang alliances tearing Haiti apart”; InSight Crime, “G9 and family”; and InSight Crime, “400 Mawozo”.

2022 to August 2023, and statistics on seizures and crime in Haiti collected by United Nations police in collaboration with the Directorate of Judicial Police.

Route one: direct shipment in containers from the United States to port in Port-au-Prince

41. One of the well-documented routes links ports in Florida directly to the ports in Port-au-Prince. Despite tight customs controls by national authorities in both countries, this route appears to be one of the main routes for the trafficking of arms and ammunition, which are transported in containers by sea. Officially reported seizures suggest that this route is used for the importation of large quantities of weapons.

Case one

42. At the National Port Authority port in Port-au-Prince in July 2022, Haitian customs authorities intercepted three containers addressed to the Episcopal Church. The containers had been shipped to Haiti by a Florida-based company. The Episcopal Church has denied any direct involvement in arms trafficking and is not under investigation.³⁴ The three containers arrived at Haitian customs in April 2022, with the goods labelled as relief supplies. Several attempts by the customs authorities to verify the contents of the containers were blocked and rumours began circulating of possible malfeasance.³⁵ In July 2022, the Haitian customs authorities gained access and inspected the containers. While the first container did not raise suspicions, in the second container customs officials discovered at least \$50,00 in counterfeit bills and:

- 11 semi-automatic rifles (5.56 mm)
- 6 semi-automatic rifles (7.62 x 39 mm)
- 4 pistols (9 mm and .40 Smith and Wesson)
- 1 shotgun (12 g)
- Multiple rifle magazines
- Ammunition:
 - 12,599 rounds of 7.62 x 39 mm
 - 180 rounds of 7.62 x 51 mm
 - 443 rounds of 5.56 mm
 - 112 rounds of 12-gauge shells
 - 1,311 rounds of 9 x 19 mm

Case two

43. Between 7 and 13 June 2023, in Port-au-Prince, Haitian customs authorities carried out a verification search of a suspected shipping container dispatched from Florida and held at the Drouillard warehouse after clearance at the customs office. The customs officers were supported by investigators from the Criminal Affairs Bureau of the Directorate of Judicial Police. Upon opening the container, the following items were discovered:

³⁴ See Brian Ellsworth and Harol Issac, “Anger grows in Haiti over weapons trafficking from U.S. after guns shipped as church donation”, Reuters, 28 July 2022.

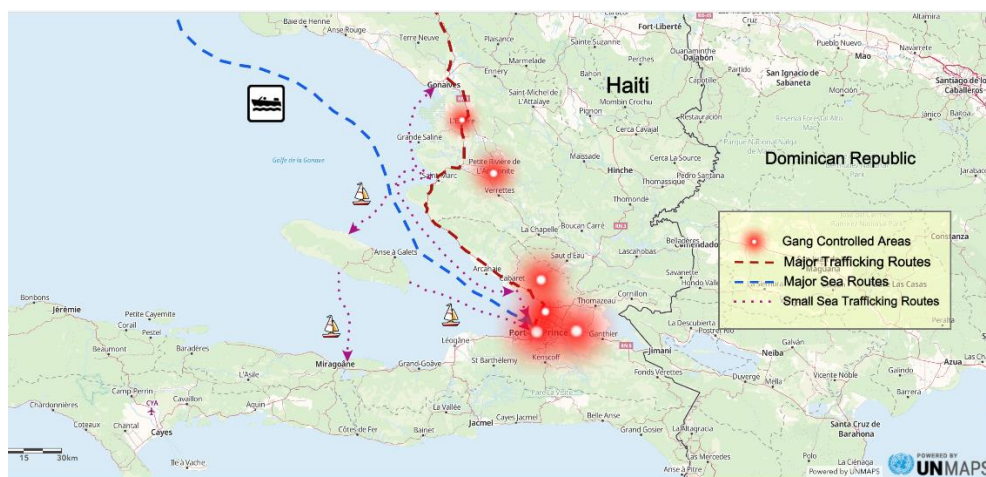
³⁵ See National Human Rights Defence Network, “Seizure of illicit objects at the customs of Port-au-Prince”, 14 October 2022.

- Stock of a blue and black Palmetto assault rifle
- A breech
- A set of spare parts for assembling the rifle
- A ballistic helmet
- 17 boxes of 5.56 calibre cartridges (20 rounds each)
- A box of 9 mm calibre cartridges containing 115 rounds
- Two empty boxes bearing the Glock logo
- Five magazines compatible with the rifle

Route two: from the United States to Port-de-Paix then by land to Port-au-Prince

44. Under the second identified route, ships arrive in Port-de-Paix from the United States, the Turks and Caicos Islands and the Bahamas. Arms and ammunition are unloaded and transported overland to Gonaïves or Saint-Marc. They are then transported on small boats to Ile de la Gonâve, before being sent to Port-au-Prince by sea. In some cases, the arms and ammunition are transported directly from Port-de-Paix to Titanyen in the Lafito area, where gangs and traffickers have control and access to numerous docks from which they can load arms and ammunition for trans-shipment to the Port-au-Prince on small boats or by road.

Map 1
Northern route³⁶



Case three

45. On 1 July 2022, an operation carried out at the wharf of Port-de-Paix by the Haitian National Police with the support of customs agents, followed by a search of the home of one suspect, resulted in the seizure of:

- 120,397 rounds of ammunition, distributed in 157 cases, including:
 - 114,000 rounds of 5.56 x 45 mm ammunition
 - 4,000 rounds of 7.62 x 39 mm ammunition

³⁶ Interview with key informants KI1, KI2, KI3 and KI4 (August and September 2023).

- 35 rounds of .38 special ammunition
- 2,000 rounds of 9 x 19 mm ammunition
- One 38-calibre revolver
- 32 magazines
- 20 rifle cases
- \$3,950 and 817,760 gourde

According to initial information, the ammunition, weapons and accessories were imported from the United States and transported to Port-de-Paix aboard a cargo ship from Florida.

Case four

46. On 13 July 2022, 175 rounds of 9 mm ammunition were seized in Port-de-Paix aboard a general cargo ship that travels between Miami to Port-de-Paix.

Case five

47. On the night of 12–13 July 2022, the Haitian National Police arrested a suspect on a bus in Port-de-Paix en route to Port-au-Prince. During a search of the vehicle, the Police discovered 25,000 weapon cartridges in 25 boxes.

Case six

48. On 21 July 2022, during a search of a utility vessel at the Port-de-Paix wharf, officers from several special units of the Haitian National Police and customs discovered a clandestine shipment of arms and ammunition. The ship's voyage had originated in the United States. The following weapons and ammunition were found:

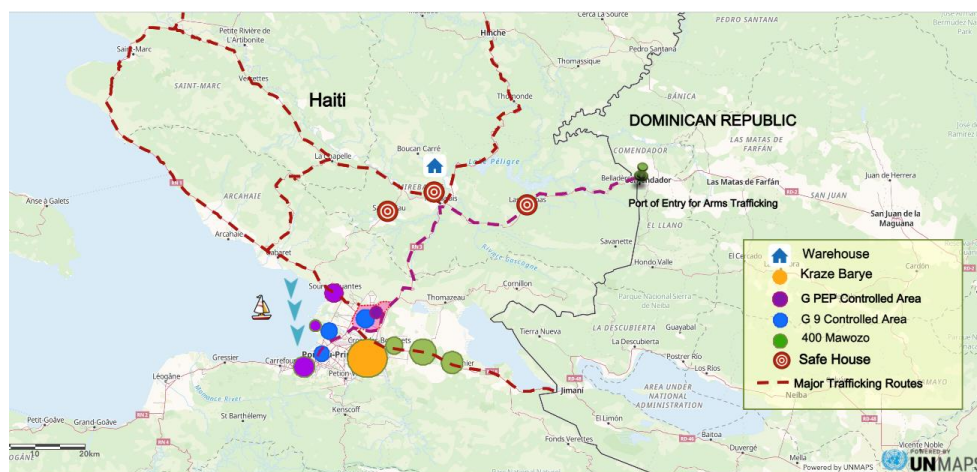
- 7 handguns, including:
 - 4 x 40-calibre pistols
 - 2 x 9 mm-calibre pistols
 - One 38 special-calibre revolver
- 434 rounds of ammunition:
 - 197 rounds of 9 mm ammunition
 - 182 rounds of .40 Smith and Wesson ammunition
 - 55 rounds of .38 special ammunition
- 9 magazines
 - 6 .40 Smith and Wesson calibre
 - 3 x 9 mm calibre

Route three: by land from the Dominican Republic via the Belladère and Malpasse border crossings to Port-au-Prince

49. Firearms and ammunition are also shipped to Haiti via the Dominican Republic and, to a lesser extent, Jamaica.³⁷ Weapons may first transit through key ports in Santo Domingo, such as Haina, before being shipped across land border crossings into Haiti. Firearms and ammunition have been seized at border crossings, including Ouanaminthe/Dajabon, Belladère/Elías Piña and Malpasse/Jimani.³⁸ The extent of cross-border trafficking depends on police or customs controls, as well as the presence of gangs. Once across the land border from the Dominican Republic, the contraband is moved through Belladère or Malpasse to Lascahobas or Mirebalais and then onwards to Croix des Bouquets or Titanyen, and finally to Port-au-Prince. By using these routes, the illegal cargo is moved from city to city and from safe house to safe house, avoiding police checkpoints and customs offices along the way. Safe houses are used to store and hide weapons and ammunition before they are delivered to their destination. They can take many forms, including unused warehouses, empty houses or farms.

Map 2

Land trafficking route from the Dominican Republic, via Belladère, to Port-au-Prince³⁹



Case seven

50. On the night of 30–31 July 2023, two individuals were arrested in Belladère during an investigation by the Intervention and Research Brigade related to suspicion of arms and drug trafficking offences. Several weapons were seized on the outskirts of Belladère, including one Uzi submachine gun, one AR-15 assault rifle (with two magazines) and one Valero automatic rifle (with one magazine). Other goods seized

³⁷ Jamaica has also experienced a surge in firearm seizures in recent years. According to the Jamaican police, there was a 37 per cent increase in firearm seizures in the first six months of 2022 compared with 2021. Specifically, the Jamaican police claimed to have seized 163 firearms compared with 44 in 2021, including a 100 per cent increase in rifles and a 26 per cent increase in pistols. According to the illicit arms flows questionnaire completed by Jamaica for 2022, there are non-verified reports of concealment of firearms in small vessels. Specialists noted that there were “frequent” interceptions of firearms coming via fishing boats through local ports, but those allegations could not be independently verified as of December 2022. See Jamaica Constabulary Force, “Firearms seizures 2022”. Available at <https://jcf.gov.jm/significant-increase-in-firearms-seizures-since-january/>.

³⁸ UNODC, “Haiti’s criminal markets”.

³⁹ Interview with key informants KI1, KI2, KI3 and KI4 (August and September 2023).

during the operation included cash, thirty-seven 5.56 mm calibre cartridges, four 12-gauge calibre cartridges and ten 9 mm calibre cartridges, as well as mobile phones and a vehicle.

Case eight

51. On 8 November 2022, soldiers from the Specialized Land Border Security Corps assigned in the Elías Piña border operations base in the Dominican Republic discovered a cargo of clandestine ammunition including:

- 22,160 rounds of ammunition, including:
 - 12,000 rounds of 7.62 x 39 mm ammunition
 - 10,160 rounds of 5.56 mm ammunition
- 5 phones

Route four: Cap-Haïtien, smuggling in personal effects

52. Several seizures have been made in Cap-Haïtien. An important operation took place on 30 December 2022, during which 989 units of 9 mm calibre ammunition were discovered. Since July 2022, six seizures by the Haitian customs authorities comprised small quantities of weapons and ammunition being smuggled by people contained in their shipments of personal effects as a means of transport.

III. Illicit financial flows

Sources of illicit financial flows

53. Data currently produced by Haitian government authorities do not allow for evidence-based, non-speculative mapping and statistical analysis of illicit financial flows into and out of the country. While Haitian banks and money transfer services report some “suspicious financial transactions” to the Central Financial Intelligence Unit, other authorities that are obliged to do so, for example foreign exchange bureaux, notaries and real estate lawyers, have yet to report such transactions to the Unit. Although several hundred suspicious financial transaction reports are received annually, this data cannot be considered an indication of financial flows, as the reporting is based purely on suspicion of illicit activity and depends on the ability of financial institutions to detect suspicious activity. Without further analysis it is not possible to determine if such transactions relate to money-laundering as a predicate offence.

54. Several financial intelligence products have been disseminated by the Central Financial Intelligence Unit to the Prosecutor’s Office, although it is unclear how these intelligence products are used and no money-laundering convictions have been achieved. The Financial and Economic Affairs Bureau of the Haitian National Police is working on several cases related to economic crime, corruption and money-laundering. Some of these cases have a cross-border component with assets being located abroad in the United States, Canada and European Union countries. Domestically, the proceeds of crime are believed to be laundered primarily via the real estate sector, the use of businesses and shell companies, fuel stations and lotteries. There have been some cases of property confiscation in Haiti following convictions of Haitian nationals involved in drug trafficking in the United States.

55. Revenue for the various gangs operating in Haiti comes from several sources, including payments from corrupt former and current political figures and business owners. In addition, revenues come from monthly protection payments from industries, companies or commercial enterprises operating in territory controlled by

the gangs. This includes the La Saline, Drouillard, Cité Soleil, Santo, Croix des Bouquets, Delmas, Cité Militaire, Airport Road, Torcel and Tabarre areas. The protection payments range from \$5,000 to over \$100,000. Gangs also obtain funds from kidnapping, hijacking truck containers or goods, or drug trafficking.

56. The new decree on countering money-laundering, financing of Terrorism and financing of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction was made public on 10 June. The decree, which was approved by the Council of Ministers in late April and published in the *Official Gazette* on 4 May, established a set of measures to detect and discourage those crimes and facilitate the related investigations and prosecutions.

IV. Conclusions and recommendations

57. The multifaceted crisis in Haiti is a composite of several factors, including advanced economic breakdown, catastrophic sanitation conditions, growing and widespread poverty, a lack of social support, widespread corruption and access to arms for predatory armed groups serving the personal, political or economic interests of a few. The violence, which the Haitian people experience on a daily basis, must be stopped to enable the Government to gain control of all of the sectors of activity that are intrinsic to its existence, such as justice, the economy, taxation, welfare and health, among others. Alongside other efforts to address the root causes and factors that drive the violence, fragile social cohesion and daily fighting on the streets of Port-au-Prince, Artibonite and other areas controlled by gangs, direct attention must be paid to blocking the flow of arms and ammunition into Haiti and into the hands of armed groups. Without any serious action being taken to meet these complex challenges, gangs will continue to strengthen and roam freely in the capital and become more unmanageable. Better understanding the operations behind these flows, tighter controls at borders in Haiti and abroad and improved and increased maritime interdiction mechanisms seem to be a prerequisite for action against trafficking in weapons and ammunition.

58. Any measures to control weapons and seize drugs must be further accompanied by improved transparency and accountability over political and economic actors who may be involved in trafficking, illicit financial flows and supporting armed groups with financial resources and material. There is currently no capacity to electronically detect economic crime or trace illicit financial flows. As long as this is the case, it will be extremely difficult to stop those who are financially benefiting from this situation from further perpetuating it.

59. The United Nations remains determined to work with international partners to support Haiti and its key institutions to restore public security, criminal justice, border control and customs institutions.

60. UNODC recommends that the Government of Haiti consider the actions set out below.

61. With regard to control of and trafficking in arms and ammunition:

(a) Enhance the capacities of the national authorities to collect and analyse firearms seizure data, with a view to making operational and analytical use of such data to systematically trace illicit firearms;

(b) Centralize firearms regulation and management in Haiti, including for firearms belonging to private security companies;

(c) Increase accountability and integrity measures for control of firearms and ammunition to reduce the risks of diversion of and trafficking in firearms;

(d) Enhance capabilities to register firearms and ammunition so as to increase accountability, strengthen inventory controls and increase interoperability between databases, to reduce the risk of diversion and trafficking;

(e) Support the safe and secure storage and management of seized and other illicit firearms and ammunition through technical support and equipment, and develop standard operating procedures for State-held and seized or surrendered weapons;

(f) Enhance the capacities of criminal justice institutions, in particular the Haitian National Police and specialized border control agencies and units, to effectively detect, investigate and prosecute firearms trafficking and related offences, through an increase in capacity-building activities and technical support. In that regard, streamlining investigation protocols for seized firearms to encompass handling and tracing, currently overseen by the Directorate of Judicial Police, would yield substantial benefits. It would also be relevant to bolster the capabilities of the national agencies responsible for border control, law enforcement and justice delivery, including customs, defence forces, police units, investigative bodies, prosecution services and the judiciary;

(g) Enhance capabilities to detect firearms, including by procurement of technical equipment for firearms detection and establishing robust controls at border control points within the country and at the border with and in the Dominican Republic;

(h) Improve inter-agency cooperation and data-sharing by establishing an integrated firearms centre to serve as a centralized hub for collecting, analysing and integrating firearms-related data from law enforcement agencies in Haiti;

(i) Strengthen regional cooperation and information-sharing to address firearms trafficking, including transnational investigations and joint investigation teams to disrupt firearms flows to organized criminal groups, gangs and armed groups;

(j) Engage with local communities and civil society organizations, especially women and youth, to support armed violence reduction initiatives and promote resilient and safe communities to reduce the levels of armed and gender-based violence;

(k) Enhance systems aimed at controlling and regulating licit arms and arms flows, to prevent their diversion into the illegal circuit and facilitate the investigation and prosecution of related offences without hampering legitimate transfers.

62. With regard to illicit financial flows:

(a) Strengthen legal and institutional frameworks and national capacities to prevent and fight corruption effectively, in line with the recommendations of the Mechanism for the Review of Implementation of the United Nations Convention against Corruption;

(b) Strengthen the capacity of national actors, notably the investigative unit of the Haitian National Police, the Prosecutor's Office and investigative judges, to effectively investigate corruption and economic crime, including through international cooperation;

(c) Enhance coordination among the actors involved in the investigation, prosecution and adjudication of corruption cases, notably the Anti-Corruption Unit, the Haitian National Police and the judiciary, as well as cooperation with investigators and prosecutors from other jurisdictions;

(d) Improve understanding among the competent authorities and the private sector of the risks related to money-laundering and financing of terrorism and enhance the inter-agency Anti-Money Laundering and Combating Financing of Terrorism policy, coordination and information-sharing mechanisms;

(e) Enhance the effectiveness of the Central Financial Intelligence Unit and law enforcement and judicial authorities with regard to the detection, investigation and prosecution of money-laundering, financing of terrorism and the underlying predicate offences, including through international cooperation;

(f) Install financial tracking software that would, inter alia, allow for case management and the collection of statistical data on intelligence-sharing, investigations and prosecutions;

(g) Develop cooperative relationships with foreign investigators and prosecutors to detect, trace and confiscate the proceeds of crime committed in Haiti and invested abroad.

Annex

List of firearms seized in Haiti, 2021–2023

		<i>Pistol</i>	<i>Revolver</i>	<i>Rifle</i>	<i>Shotgun</i>	<i>Home-made weapons</i>	<i>Total</i>
2021	January	30	2	8	1	9	50
	February	27	1	8	5	–	41
	March	8	2	3	1	5	19
	April	23	4	2	2	8	39
	May	15	5	3	1	3	27
	June	3	1	2	–	6	12
	July	17	1	13	7	7	45
	August	25	3	2	3	4	37
	September	16	6	6	–	12	40
	October	18	1	3	2	2	26
	November	16	–	6	4	3	29
	December	24	3	3	5	1	36
	Total	222	29	59	31	60	401
2022	January	19	–	4	1	1	25
	February	10	2	2	1	6	21
	March	26	5	2	3	5	41
	April	15	5	4	3	5	32
	May	29	6	7	–	6	48
	June	13	1	3	–	2	19
	July	30	3	23	2	1	59
	August	11	–	4	2	2	19
	September	4	1	5	3	4	17
	October	9	2	5	–	6	22
	November	16	2	6	1	1	26
	December	10	1	1	1	–	13
	Total	192	28	66	17	39	342
2023	January	14	1	7	1	2	25
	February	16	4	3	2	–	25
	March	9	4	3	–	5	21
	April	20	–	10	1	–	31
	May	4	1	5	1	1	12
	June	4	2	5	1	4	16
	July	9	2	3	1	4	19
	Total	76	14	36	7	16	130