

Haiti plunges into violence



By María Josefina Arce.

Violence has taken over Haiti. The small Caribbean country is experiencing a critical and alarming situation; criminal gangs have been taking over the territory and already control 80% of it, sowing terror among the civilian population and causing numerous victims.

According to the United Nations, in the month of January violence left more than 800 dead. In 2023 alone, some 8,000 people were victims of gang attacks, a high figure that includes deaths, injuries and kidnappings.

And the wave of insecurity escalated over the weekend, with the attack by criminal groups against the main prison in Port-au-Prince, the capital. Thousands of inmates escaped, which led the authorities to decree a 72-hour state of emergency and a curfew in most of the country as of Sunday.

Considered the poorest nation in the hemisphere, Haiti is currently experiencing a humanitarian crisis due to the chaos unleashed by gangs that have led to the closure of businesses and other economic activities, in addition to the impact of natural disasters over time.

Late last month the UN launched an appeal for \$674 million to help nearly four million Haitians suffering from food insecurity.

The assassination in 2021 of President Jovenel Moïse led to an upsurge in violence and the failure of Prime Minister Ariel Henry to call general elections unleashed chaos in the Caribbean country, which also currently has no active parliament. The mandate of the last senators will expire in January 2023.

The truth is that Haiti has experienced very complex moments throughout its history, with economic, political, social and health crises and interventions by foreign forces, the first of them in 1915 by the United States, which lasted until 1934, increasing poverty and inequality among the population.

Then came the bloody dictatorship of the Duvalier family in the 50's and until 1986. Forty thousand deaths, more than a million exiles and scandalous poverty were the sad outcome of that period.

From that moment on, the presence of foreign troops in the country, which also suffered a devastating earthquake in 2010 with a death toll of more than 220,000, was registered in different stages.

The current situation, which is deteriorating by the minute, is causing concern and alarm. Many voices, such as CELAC, Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, have called for an urgent dialogue between civil society and political actors to find a way out of the current political and social instability in Haiti.

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