

Haiti: Preparing for Elections

by Daniel P. Erikson and Adam Minson

Introduction

On April 20, 2005, the Inter-American Dialogue held a day-long workshop to explore how Haiti can best prepare for municipal, legislative, and presidential elections scheduled for later this year. Since March 2004, Haiti has been governed by interim Prime Minister Gerard Latortue and his cabinet of ministers, who took power following the resignation of former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. The planned elections are intended to replace the transition government and seat thousands of elected and appointed officials, including local mayors, national deputies and senators, and a new president.

This workshop was organized to promote a multilateral dialogue focused on Haiti's most critical needs: elections, security, and poverty reduction. The meeting brought together a broad group of participants to explore their differences, seek areas of consensus, and discuss ideas for policy and action. Participants included representatives from the Haitian government; members of the electoral council; leaders from Haiti's political parties, private sector, and civil society; policymakers and officials from the United States and other donor governments; officials from bilateral and multilateral development agencies; and senior representatives of the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti and the OAS Special Mission in Haiti. The meeting was attended by leaders from key political parties in Haiti, including Fanmi Lavalas, KID, OPL, RDNP, and UNCRH, and at least five potential presidential candidates were present. Several civil society groups were also represented, including CLED, the Group of 184, the Haitian Press Association, and the National Network for the Defense of Human Rights.

Outlook for Elections

Haiti has not held an election in five years; today, the country is virtually devoid of elected leaders. Haiti's nine-member provisional electoral council, which has ultimate authority over the voting process, has established a preliminary timeline for elections. Municipal elections are scheduled for October 9, with a first round of legislative and presidential contests scheduled for November 13, followed by a second round on December 18. The UN Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) and the Organization of American States are working closely with Haitian actors to organize the vote. Although the provisional electoral council has been criticized for moving too slowly and being ineffectual, the body is generally considered more transparent than its predecessors, some of which were considered overly politicized or complicit in fraud. Still, the electoral council will need to hasten its preparations if elections are to occur on schedule.

The Organization of American States is providing technical and administrative support to the Haitian electoral council, and it is deeply engaged in administering the vast voter registration process. In the three months since late April, more than half of 424 planned registration stations have opened throughout Haiti with the goal of registering over 4 million voters and providing voting-age Haitians with a national identification card. The United Nations estimates that about 40 percent of Haitians lack birth certificates, although the prospect of obtaining a voter identity card may motivate many citizens to register. Some participants proposed that Haiti's interim govern-

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Haiti

Conference
Report

Foreword

The Inter-American Dialogue is pleased to present the report from our conference entitled “Haiti: Preparing for Elections.” The discussion focused on what can and should be done now to increase the odds for successful elections in Haiti. The conference provided the opportunity for a politically diverse group of institutions and individuals to review the difficult issues and choices facing the country; to reach agreement on the key questions, while systematically and frankly probing their differences; and to offer some concrete proposals for action by governments, multilateral agencies, and non-governmental organizations.

Haiti’s political situation continues to be deeply troubled, but the upcoming elections provide some room for hope that progress can be made. The United Nations Mission in Haiti has increased its troop levels and extended its mandate through February of next year, ensuring that peacekeepers will be present throughout the electoral process. Voter registration, though slow, is proceeding, and there are signs that political campaigns will begin shortly. International donor agencies are working diligently to find ways to deal with the country’s core problems of poverty and economic backwardness. Even though no one can be very confident about Haiti’s prospects in the coming months or even years, the role of the international community is crucial for any advance towards democracy and economic development.

This report, written by Daniel Erikson, who directs the Dialogue’s work on Haiti, and his colleague Adam Minson, highlights the main points and observations made at the conference held on April 20 in Washington, D.C. We did not expect or achieve consensus, but our intense discussions did lead to clearer definition of some of the crucial problems. We are grateful to all who participated, especially the several dozen representatives from Haiti’s political parties, electoral council, civil society, and private sector, as well as the representatives of various international organizations who traveled to Washington for the conference.

We are grateful to the Canadian International Development Agency, the Government of Finland, and the World Bank for their contribution to the April meeting and their continued support for the Dialogue’s work on Haiti.

Peter Hakim
President

Daniel Erikson
Program Director

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ment require all citizens to obtain these cards, which would help to increase voter registration levels and facilitate greater voter turnout in elections. Some Haitian-American participants asked the OAS to consider means to register overseas Haitians, and the electoral council is weighing a proposal to allow Haitians living abroad to vote in national elections.

The UN mission in Haiti is working with the interim government to fulfill three main objectives: establish a secure and stable environment; support a constitutional political process; and promote and protect human rights. The UN election coordinator urged that elections take place on schedule, and many participants agreed that Haiti's political situation would not improve without elections. The interim government is steadily losing support, and elections are the only way to build political legitimacy. The UN election coordinator recommended that, in the meantime, the interim government formally approve the electoral calendar, establish rules for financing political campaigns, and add staff to the struggling electoral council. Representatives from the UN and OAS electoral missions also called upon the international community to cover a \$22 million shortfall in the election budget. The European Union and the United States have since pledged to provide \$19 million, some of which has been disbursed.

Fair elections in Haiti will also require adequate observation and monitoring efforts that involve the donor community, international non-governmental groups, and credible Haitian civil society organizations. Some participants feared that it would produce a conflict of interest for the UN and OAS to both organize and monitor the elections. Others felt that these concerns were overstated and that UN and OAS observation would be preferable to the current shortage of monitors in the country. Yet even if these

organizations dispatched new monitors immediately, a host of other factors could prevent credible elections from taking place on the proposed timetable.

The absence of adequate security in the capital city of Port-au-Prince is the crucial challenge to credible elections. While some participants saw Iraq as a model for organizing elections in a poor security climate, others disputed the usefulness of that comparison. In Iraq, 150,000 coalition troops helped to support a U.S.-run electoral process, while in Haiti, the UN mission only had 6,700 troops mandated to support an anemic electoral council and a weak interim government. Many feared that Haiti's political situation is ripe for electoral irregularities that have proven so damaging in the past. Haiti also lacks clear political party financing laws, and some believed that drug trafficking or other criminal revenues will emerge as a central source of campaign finance.

It is still unclear whether members of Lavalas, the party of former President Aristide, will choose to boycott the elections. However, some in Lavalas are encouraging supporters to register to vote, and the party will assess the conditions for its participation at the close of the registration process. Lavalas representatives argued that they are being targeted by ex-military and the interim government, citing the imprisonment of party-members for political reasons and continuing concerns about violence and harassment. In the view of Lavalas, the UN and OAS have not done enough to investigate political persecution and work for the release of all political prisoners prior to elections. This view was not shared by other political party leaders, who believed that prosecution of former government officials was an important element of restoring rule of law in Haiti.

“Will Lavalas
boycott the
elections?”

“Anything less than full disarmament is a recipe for continued instability.”

Although several participants endorsed the idea of a pact of non-violence among parties and candidates, Haiti appears caught in a dangerous dilemma. Proceeding on the current timetable risks producing a severely compromised election, but postponing the elections means that Haiti will continue without an effective or legitimate government. Some participants felt that rushing to elections in Haiti would inevitably result in vote-count irregularities, intimidation, politically-motivated violence, and disputed outcomes.

Security for Elections

Haiti's security situation remains extremely turbulent. The UN stabilization mission replaced a short-term U.S.-led force in the summer of 2004, but it did not approach mandated troop levels until last December—more than nine months after Aristide's departure. Since then, the Brazilian-led forces, consisting of about 6,200 soldiers and 1,400 civilian police, began to more aggressively implement their mandate to disarm gangs, armed militant groups, and former soldiers of Haiti's disbanded military, known as ex-F'AdH. But criticism of the UN mission has not abated, and the security situation appears to have deteriorated even further. Rates of kidnapping, robbery, and homicide have spiked in recent months, and the U.S. embassy recently evacuated all non-essential personnel from the country. According to one U.S. Defense Department analyst, illegal forces retain functional control over significant portions of Haiti's national territory.

By contrast, the UN and U.S. Department of State representatives were emphatic that international and Haitian authorities can provide a secure election environment in 2005. In particular, the UN disputed the assertion that the mere presence of gangs and ex-military in many areas amounted to functional control, instead describing Haiti's armed actors as highly fragmented and disorganized. Most participants agreed that it was unrealistic to consider comprehensive

disarmament as a prerequisite for fair elections, given that a full recovery of Haiti's absconded weapons would take years. Others believed that anything less than full disarmament would be a recipe for continued instability. Some thought that the security forces in Haiti should seek to achieve the more modest goal of ensuring that elections are not subject to gross interference by armed actors.

The role of the Haitian National Police (HNP) remains hotly controversial. The police force was badly damaged by mass desertion during the violence in 2004, and the interim government has struggled to root out corrupt elements while recruiting, vetting, and training new officers. With about 4,000 officers for a population of 8 million, the HNP is in per capita terms one of the smallest police forces in the world. It faces the difficult task of helping to provide a secure environment for elections by combating the narcotics trade, pursuing hundreds of convicts who have escaped from jail over the past three years, and reining in gang violence. The Haitian police force is heavily outgunned by armed actors; for example, the HNP's antiterrorist unit has only 12 weapons for eighty officers. At present, the U.S. maintains a 14-year-old embargo on arms sales to the country, though the law does allow for a waiver “in a case of exceptional or undue hardship, or when it is otherwise in the interest of the United States government.” The State Department has notified the U.S. Congress of its intent to issue limited waivers for arms sales to the HNP, with strict agreements on the end-use of the weapons purchased. This is a divisive issue, because Haitians disagree on whether better equipping the HNP would improve security, or merely arm a police force that is too ineffective and corrupt to play a constructive role.

Several ideas and proposals did emerge from the discussion. International and Haitian security officials agreed that more foreign police are needed to support Haitian forces during the elections. Yet the mission's new man-

date increases the UN International Civilian Police force (CIVPOL) by just 275, bringing the total possible forces to 1,900 officers through February 15, 2006. The international community could examine giving CIVPOL powers of arrest, which would facilitate disarmament and provide a stronger deterrent to violence in areas where the Haitian National Police are too weak to act. Some felt that it was MINUSTAH's military contingent—not CIVPOL—that most needed strengthening in order to implement disarmament more effectively. In particular, some believed that only U.S. marines could give MINUSTAH the needed boost. However, the United States refuses to contribute troops to the UN mission.

Poverty Reduction

Haiti's economy remains deeply troubled. In addition to violence and economic mismanagement, the country was hit twice by devastating rains and flash floods last year that deepened the humanitarian crisis in some of the most desperate communities. Today, more than 80 percent of Haitians live in poverty, with half of the population facing extreme poverty. In real terms, per capita income has fallen by one third during the last decade. The country's political instability has exacerbated levels of economic distress, magnified policy incoherence, and squandered resources. Foreign assistance did achieve some progress on poverty reduction during the latter half of the 1990s, but much of this evaporated during the last five years. The disputed legislative elections of May 2000 sparked a four-year political crisis that froze international aid to the Haitian government. Growth stalled and the government's scarce ability to deliver social services all but disintegrated, while international aid was channeled through private relief agencies.

In July 2004, Haiti's interim government presented international donors with a multi-dimensional development plan known as the Interim Cooperation Framework (ICF). More

than \$1.1 billion was pledged by the international community to help fund this plan, which included projects to assist Haiti's poor by promoting economic growth and improving access to basic services. Despite initial optimism about this approach, less than one-fifth of pledged assistance had been disbursed after nine months. The interim government has struggled to manage complicated aid procedures and absorb even a fraction of pledged resources, while some projects were delayed due to continuing insecurity. Disappointment with slow disbursement motivated a donor's conference in Cayenne, French Guiana in March 2005. The Cayenne meeting sought to accelerate aid flows and project implementation by assigning 380 projects to individual donor countries, creating greater accountability in the delivery of international assistance. In addition, some donor agencies have simplified their lending procedures to accommodate the limitations of the interim government.

In the view of Haiti's planning ministry, the ICF represents an effort to make modest improvements in the short term. After the elections, the successor government will replace the ICF with a new Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), developed through consultations with international donors and the broadest possible range of political parties and civil society. In the meantime, the World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) have become more deeply engaged in Haiti, with respectively \$150 million and \$263 million in assistance pledged through September 2006. The international financial institutions underlined the need to avoid past mistakes, such as poor coordination among donors; a lack of Haitian ownership; and attempts to circumvent state agencies. Still, it has been difficult to achieve "Haitian ownership" of the development process with only a poorly-equipped interim government in place. Since the Latortue government will not remain in power much longer, some participants felt that the international

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“Haiti's political gangs, ex-military officers, and drug traffickers are poised to create major headaches for democratic consolidation.”

donor community should become much more active in managing and implementing development projects through the transition period. Early discussions with political candidates on the economic and development challenges facing donor programs in Haiti will also help create a smoother transition.

Managing the Transition

Although preparing for Haiti's upcoming vote is the central concern, the transition to an elected government will also pose challenges. If elections are held on schedule, then in early 2006 several thousand new officials will occupy positions ranging from local mayors to national legislators and the presidency. In many cases, newly elected Haitians will be occupying positions left vacant for years. Established policies and strong institutions will not exist to support them. In addition, the possibility of technically flawed elections marked by low voter turnout, party-sponsored boycotts, or electoral violence could undermine confidence in the incoming government and make it difficult to govern effectively. Should the UN forces withdraw or be drawn down prematurely, the door will open to increased violence.

While most participants from Haitian political parties regretted the presence of international troops in Haiti, they differed on how long troops should remain after elections. Some urged that the forces act more quickly today to disarm gangs and secure the territory, in order to exit as early as possible. Others believed that a major troop departure in early 2006 would be very destabilizing, given the small size of the HNP and the indications that disarmament will be partial at best. In addition, the consolidation and professionalization of the HNP will depend upon the continued presence and oversight of the UN and other international actors. Indeed, there is a compelling argument that the UN exited prematurely in the late 1990s, which contributed to the deterioration that provoked Haiti's current crisis. The legitimacy of the future government will depend in part on its

ability to maintain law and order, which will probably require the presence of international troops. However, the continued presence of international troops will likely remain a source of tension if they are not seen to be adequately performing their mandate. It appears that some Haitian actors believe that their political objectives can best be pursued without peacekeepers.

A range of political party members supported the idea of a national dialogue that would engage the full range of political and civil actors, with designs to mitigate the country's intense polarization. This may help Haiti move beyond its tradition of winner-take-all politics, and some participants proposed that the dialogue should lead to a coalition government. Others considered that goal unrealistic, but were more confident that the dialogue could produce a national consensus on certain policy priorities, perhaps around a central theme like modernization or poverty reduction.

Conclusion

The challenges facing longer-term democratic consolidation in Haiti are considerable, but free and fair elections represent an important first step. Even if the Haitian elections demonstrate technical integrity and are broadly participatory, Haiti will need to develop strong civil and political institutions in order to sustain a democratic government. For its part, the international community should prepare for constructive engagement with the Haitian government over the long term. Armed non-governmental forces in Haiti—including political gangs, ex-military officers, and, to some extent, drug traffickers—also have the potential to create major long-term headaches for democratic consolidation. Despite the formidable obstacles to elections in Haiti, the democratic process offers an important opportunity to reinvigorate the country's political and economic institutions. Haitian actors and the international community should not squander this opportunity to help move Haiti towards a better future.

“Haiti: Preparing for Elections”

An Inter-American Dialogue Workshop

Wednesday, April 20, 2005

The Mount Vernon Room of the Madison Hotel

15th & M Street N.W., Washington, D.C.

8:30 a.m.

Opening Remarks

8:45 – 10:15 a.m.

Outlook for Elections in 2005

What needs to be accomplished to hold successful elections in Haiti? How are the political parties planning to participate? What constructive steps can be taken by Haitian political actors and the international community?

- Francois Benoit, Provisional Electoral Council
- Elizabeth Spehar, Organization of American States
- Gerard Le Chevallier, UN Mission in Haiti

10:30 a.m. – 12:15 p.m.

Security for Elections

What are the main security challenges that have to be met to hold fair elections? How can progress be made on restoring the Haitian National Police and addressing Haiti's longer-term security needs? What needs to be done to ensure that elections improve Haiti's prospects for political stability?

- John Merrill, U.S. Department of Defense
- Leon Charles, Haitian National Police
- Colonel John Forquer, U.S. Southern Command

12:15 p.m.

Remarks by Adolfo Franco, Assistant Administrator, USAID

12:30 – 1:45 p.m.

Working Lunch

- Ambassador Juan Gabriel Valdes, UN Mission in Haiti

1:45 – 3:30 p.m.

Poverty Reduction

What can be done to expedite progress on education, health care, and other important social services? How much foreign aid is being delivered, and how is it being used? How is the upcoming election likely to impact efforts to reduce poverty in Haiti?

- Roland Pierre, Minister of Planning and Cooperation
- Caroline Anstey, World Bank
- Barbara Szaszkiwicz, Inter-American Development Bank
- Leslie Manigat, RDNP

3:45 – 5:15 p.m.

Managing the Transition

What are the likely challenges facing the transition to a newly elected government? How should the interim administration plan to manage the transition to its successor? What can be done by the political parties to help support this process? What should be the role of the international community after the election?

- Max Chauvet, CLED
- Paul Denis, OPL
- Leslie Voltaire, Lavalas

5:15 p.m.

Closing Remarks



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