

The Gender-Based Violence Crisis in Haiti

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SEPTEMBER 2024

THE ISSUE

Gender-based violence (GBV) in Haiti is a widespread and escalating problem, exacerbated by the country's deep-rooted gender inequalities, systemic impunity, and political instability. As the political and security crisis in Haiti has deepened in recent years, the use of GBV, particularly sexual violence, has increased as a systematic tool of intimidation and punishment, and ultimately of control. Local civil society organizations are continuing their efforts to support survivors of GBV, but they require additional external assistance. With the formation of a new interim government and the arrival of the Kenyan-led, UN-backed Multinational Security Support (MSS) Mission earlier in 2024, it becomes imperative to understand GBV's deeply entrenched roots and recent expansion and escalation in order to begin to effectively address this crisis.

INTRODUCTION

To outside observers, Haiti's current political situation might appear to be a continuation of its long history of political turmoil, delayed elections, coup d'états, dictatorships, political repression, and human rights abuses. Yet for those closer to the crisis, what has transpired in recent years is unprecedented. The rise of hundreds of well-armed gangs has taken the country's violent history to new heights. The chaos that ensued after the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse in July 2021 and the resignation of interim prime minister Ariel Henry in April 2024 has allowed the armed gangs to gain near-total control of the country's capital, Port-au-Prince, and, increasingly, the countryside. These criminal groups have spread terror among the population, and the use of sexual violence has become a strategic tool for control.

This chaos obscures the gendered consequences of the ongoing violence and insecurity on the population. While no one group is exempt from gang violence, murder, extortion,

and other forms of control, the impact on women and girls, and consequently on the societal fabric, merits particular attention. To understand how GBV is being used as a strategic weapon, it is important to recognize how different actors are utilizing such violence, the magnitude of the cruelty, and the sheer number of cases of sexual violence and other forms of GBV in the context of a nearly nonexistent state. It is also important to recognize that Haiti's historic rates of GBV are rooted in its history, cultural norms, and social structures, which have perpetuated cycles of violence and discrimination against women and girls.

Gender-based violence is harm, whether physical, sexual, psychological, or economic, directed against an individual because of their gender; it can also be violence that disproportionately harms people of a particular gender. While women and girls are the

main victims of GBV, it can be directed against men and boys, and it also causes severe harm to families and communities. **Sexual violence** is any sexual act, or attempted act, against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim. It includes, but is not limited to, rape.

OVERVIEW OF POLITICAL AND SECURITY DYNAMICS IN HAITI

The assassination of Moïse on July 7, 2021, left a power vacuum that exacerbated existing political tensions and allowed heavily armed gangs to expand their territorial control. As of mid-2024, experts estimate that approximately **200 armed gangs** are active in Haiti, with some suggesting there are **up to 300** criminal groups. These gangs cover a large proportion of the national territory and control approximately **80 percent** of the capital city, Port-au-Prince. Gangs outnumber police and carry more lethal weapons. In 2023, there were **15,500** police officers for a country of more than 11 million people, a ratio of 1:709, considerably below the **internationally accepted** police-to-population ratio of 1:450. This lack of police, coupled with gang violence, has turned Haiti into one of the deadliest countries in the world. In 2023 there were more than **4,700 homicides**, corresponding to a homicide rate of **40.9 per 100,000** inhabitants; this is more than double the median homicide rate in Latin America and the Caribbean, which is 20 per 100,000, itself the highest regional rate in the world. Between January and March 2024, **2,500 people were killed or injured**, an increase of 53 percent compared to the previous three months and the highest casualty toll reported since January 2022 by UN Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH).

Between 2018 and 2023, the authors of this brief identified at least 28 major violent events, some considered massacres, that were perpetrated by armed gangs. These events were characterized by high death tolls, numerous gang rapes of women and girls, and extensive property damage. In the capital, many occurred as a result of confrontations between two rival gang coalitions, known as the G9 and G-Pèp alliances. Initially, the gang confrontations appeared to be struggles for control of territory from which to extort revenue, but deeper analysis **revealed connections** between the gangs and political figures, as well as members of the private sector.

The **G9 Family and Allies** (G9 Fanmi e Alye, or G9), is an alliance of gangs operating in Port-au-Prince. Established in June 2020 by Jimmy Chérizier, a former police officer known as “Barbecue,” this federation unified nine of the most powerful gangs in Port-au-Prince to consolidate power and increase their influence over political and economic affairs. The G9 coordinates the activities of its member gangs, with the aim of controlling larger territories and exerting greater influence over Haiti's unstable political landscape. It **often collaborates with political elites** and engages in violent confrontations with rival gangs like G-Pèp. Chérizier and the G9 **have been linked** to Moïse and his Haitian Tèt Kale Party (PHTK), and have allegedly ensured votes and quelled social unrest in gang-controlled neighborhoods for the party.

The G-People (G-Pèp) gang alliance was formed in direct response to G9. It is led by Gabriel Jean-Pierre, also known as “Ti Gabriel,” and has been battling the G9 for **control of key areas** of Port-au-Prince and beyond. G-Pèp is broadly supported by PHTK's political opponents, including **Réginald Boulos**, one of Haiti's most important businessmen and a supporter of the two coups against former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide; Boulos also funds the gang alliance. G-Pèp controls smaller areas within the densely populated neighborhoods of Port-Au-Prince, such as Brooklyn in Cité Soleil and portions of Martissant, where the Village de Dieu gang, also known as the 5 Segonn gang (Five Seconds gang), operates. Despite their limited territorial control, these gangs are highly feared and are increasingly **resembling militias**, leading to constant and bloody territorial clashes. G-Pèp is also expanding into the outskirts of Port-au-Prince, spreading violence to more rural areas.

One gang contributing to this expansion is 400 Mawozo, the largest gang in Haiti, known for the **kidnapping** of 17 American and Canadian Protestant missionaries in 2021. The gang holds power in Croix-des-Bouquets, an important neighborhood and **criminal hotspot** north of Port-au-Prince that allows it to control major roads, including those leading to the Dominican Republic.

Within this violent context, Haitians are also lacking access to basic human necessities such as food, shelter, or healthcare. In the second quarter of 2024, the **number** of internally displaced people (IDPs) in Haiti increased from 362,000 to 578,000, a 60 percent rise. Across the country, almost **five million** Haitians are facing hunger or need food assistance, and around 1.64 million are experiencing

acute food insecurity at emergency levels. Health centers and hospitals have been attacked and looted by gangs, leaving only **20 percent of facilities** in Port-au-Prince operating normally.

The myriad consequences of this situation for women and girls have been devastating. Gang control over national roads, along with confrontations, extortion, kidnappings, and sexual violence, have **severely restricted access** to economic opportunities and health services, with a disproportionate impact on women. Reproductive health is of particular concern, as GBV rises to levels never seen before and most women in Port-au-Prince are unable to access hospitals that provide maternity and other types of critical care.

FROM COLONIAL SHADOWS TO CONTEMPORARY CRISIS: THE LEGACY OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN HAITI

The history of racism is deeply intertwined with the scourge of GBV in Haiti. Spanish and French colonizers brought African slaves to the island of Hispaniola to work in the different plantations producing sugar, coffee, indigo, cacao, and cotton. By the late 1700s in the French colony of Saint-Domingue, the slaves began organizing revolts, and they achieved independence in 1804. Even after independence, people in Europe and the United States held deep suspicions and continued **to resist the idea** of a black nation of formerly enslaved people. Although they eventually recognized the nation of Haiti, they continued to **exert control** in various ways. For instance, France **imposed crushing indemnity payments** on Haiti to compensate for the loss of its colony.

The paternalistic and patriarchal nature of Haitian society today stems from colonial oppression, when foreign powers imposed systems of domination that devalued and exploited men and women. Despite the retreat of these foreign powers, the legacy of their **oppression and racism persist** in Haiti. Repression and the desire to dominate often have a gendered component, and women—viewed as central figures within their communities—are typically among the first victims. The most defiant and influential women within their communities have often been targeted as a means to control broader social and economic dynamics, as women’s advocacy for their own rights and their families’ rights **destabilizes the established order**.

This pattern reflects a deeper strategy to exert dominance and power throughout Haiti’s complex sociopolitical history. Gender-based violence, particularly sexual violence, has been used as one tool to achieve this goal. Over time, as abusers recognized the power and importance of women’s movements to the societal fabric, their use of violence became increasingly pervasive.

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The first signs of the systematic use of sexual violence in modern Haiti emerged during the Duvalier regime. In 1957, François “Papa Doc” Duvalier established a brutal dictatorship that would rule Haiti for almost 30 years. The dictatorship created what is **considered the first paramilitary** group in Haiti, the Tonton Macoutes, which was particularly brutal and notorious for using sexual violence as a tool for political repression. Women **connected** to political dissidents were often raped and sexually abused. Although the group no longer exists, its influence is evident in the methods, roles, and impacts of modern Haitian gangs. This is seen through the continued use of sexual violence as a tool of terror to silence and punish opposition to the gangs and the political forces that support them, creating an atmosphere of fear and trauma not only for victims but also for their communities. Aside from the violence they created, one of the most enduring legacies of the Tonton Macoutes is the impunity surrounding acts of sexual violence and the **societal stigma** faced by the victims. One person working for a civil society organization on the ground in Port-au-Prince told the authors that more than 70 percent of women and girls who are victims of GBV refuse to talk about it because they know the perpetrators will not be held to account and that the crime is not taken seriously. In fact, until 2005, rape was classified only as a moral, not a criminal, offense.

The widespread use of sexual violence continued after the ouster of Jean-Claude “Baby Doc” Duvalier in 1986. The ensuing political instability that lasted through the short-lived first term of Aristide in 1991 created an environment in which massacres by police forces were **commonplace**. Organized women’s groups that emerged during the rise of a “**new feminism**” were **brutally persecuted** during this period. Between 1991 and 1994 there were **documented** cases of politically motivated police and military abuses that included rape. The 1990s were perhaps the first decade in which human rights groups, governments, multi-lateral institutions, and others began formally categorizing GBV, including sexual violence, as distinct acts of violence. During this period the systematic nature of such practices became more apparent, although still not particularly well-documented. In 1994, Human Rights Watch published one of the first reports describing sexual violence in Haiti as a “**weapon of terror**.”

After the September 1991 military coup that overthrew Aristide—Haiti’s first democratically elected president—many paramilitary groups aligned with the regime of de facto president Raoul Cédras emerged. Aristide himself had **allowed Cédras to form** the Presidential Security Force (SSP), a militia that would later oust him from power. These groups included former Macoutes who were now known as “attachés” and supported the regime with brutal impunity. The 1994 **Human Rights Watch report** revealed that the systematic sexual violence against women had a clear political dimension. **Violent actions** by the attachés, military personnel, and actors known as **Zenglendos**—another murderous group, similar to today’s gangs, created during the Duvalier years—targeted neighborhoods that were known to predominantly support Aristide’s Lavalas movement. In these neighborhoods, women were subject **to sex-specific abuse**, and many of those who experienced it also reported being interrogated about their political loyalties. In fact, many communes in Port-au-Prince experiencing widespread sexual violence today were similarly targeted in the 1990s. The collaboration between these groups created a dangerous environment and fostered a deep-seated belief that reporting sexual violence was futile and would likely result in retaliation.

Following the second ousting of Aristide in 2004, women’s groups and other nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) reported a **marked increase in rape cases** involving organized groups of armed men. For instance, between March 2004 and December 2006, a report in the British

medical journal *The Lancet* concluded that **35,000 women** were sexually assaulted, including by government forces, though there is some **controversy** surrounding the author of the report. Then, the catastrophic 2010 earthquake further exacerbated the prevalence of GBV. In the immediate aftermath, **250 rape cases** were reported in displaced persons camps, allegedly perpetrated by both fellow camp residents and some aid workers who **exploited** their positions of authority. These camps, left unprotected, became prime targets for armed men and gangs, making women and children especially vulnerable.

Post-earthquake sexual exploitation by members of the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), which was deployed in the country from 2004 to 2017, also became a major problem and a source of deep embarrassment for the United Nations. Many peacekeepers fathered children with local women and subsequently abandoned their responsibilities. Young girls were often **coerced** into sexual relationships in exchange for minimal financial aid or food, leading to a generation of children born from these exploitative encounters who then faced severe economic and social hardships.

THE CURRENT SITUATION: SYSTEMATIC USE OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Violence escalated in the country in 2018 as President Moïse—who took office the previous year—became increasingly unpopular, leading to mass mobilizations against him. Like many of his predecessors, Moïse, or at least members of his administration, **used gangs** to repress political dissent in Port-au-Prince neighborhoods known to participate in antigovernment demonstrations. Sexual violence also increased as a result. During the early stages of the current crisis, many gang attacks bore clear signs of involvement by state or political interests. However, as the crisis deepened and as power has become more fragmented, gangs—both large and small, and often less directly linked to the state—are increasingly using sexual violence for their own purposes, particularly to exert territorial control and further their illegal activities, especially extortion. This shift means that sexual violence is not only escalating in frequency but also being employed more systematically by criminals as a tool of oppression and control. This trend is particularly concerning because, as the practice spreads, it becomes more challenging to combat.

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Between late 2018 and mid-2020, three notably violent gang attacks took place in the Port-au-Prince neighborhoods of La Saline, Bel-Air, and Cité Soleil. What makes these attacks stand out is their connection to the state and the fact that the neighborhoods were opposition strongholds. The first of these three attacks, in November 2018, was led by Chérizier **along with** Joseph Pierre Richard Duplan and Fednel Monchéry, both high-ranking officials in Moïse’s administration. During this attack, Chérizier, alongside Serge Alectis, known as “Ti Junior,” of the Baz Nan Chabon gang, and other allied gangs that later formed the G9, descended on the impoverished and densely populated neighborhood of La Saline. **Over the course of two days**, Chérizier and his allies killed at least 71 people, including children; burned and looted at least 150 houses; and **raped at least 11 women**, with at least two instances of gang, or group, rape.

A year later, from November 4 to 6, 2019, Chérizier and allied gangs were reportedly hired by a Moïse **administration official** to violently remove barricades that protesters had erected on the main roads of Bel-Air. A **report by BINUH** linked the attack on the area to government officials. Six months later, between May and July 2020, the newly formed G9 alliance also **coordinated attacks** in several neighborhoods in Cité Soleil, resulting in the deaths of at least 145 civilians, the rapes of multiple women, and the destruction of homes. The National Network for the Defense of Human Rights (RNDDH) **documented** at least 18 rapes of women between June 1 and July 28, 2020. Individual accounts included women being raped in their homes or while going about daily activities, such as buying groceries.

As the political crisis peaked following the assassination of Moïse in July 2021, there was a parallel rise in sexual violence, which reached unprecedented levels. In October 2022, BINUH and the Office of the UN High Commissioner

for Human Rights (OHCHR) published a **report** documenting sexual violence by gangs in Port-au-Prince from mid-2021 to mid-2022. The report not only identified specific cases, but found that most of the sexual violence took place during gang attacks and turf wars. The gangs attacked women and girls who inadvertently crossed front lines, and used sexual violence as a threat during kidnappings and as a tool to establish dominance over territories, including by coercing women and girls under the guise of protection, or to **control access to humanitarian aid**. Based on a confidential interview with a Haitian civil society actor working on the ground conducted by the authors of this report, gangs also employ GBV as a “spoil of war” to further humiliate rival gangs when part of their territory is taken over, and to celebrate their own victories. The gangs have a stronger intelligence system than the state in the areas they control and use GBV in a premeditated manner, targeting young women between 24 and 35 years of age (and sometimes older women and even men) ahead of an effort to control an area. The 400 Mawozo gang, which controls large portions of areas that extend beyond Port-au-Prince, engages in this practice extensively, the source said.

In 2022, the systematic use of sexual violence expanded to areas and gangs traditionally less associated with state actors, such as 400 Mawozo and those connected to G-Pép, such as Gang de Canaan. These groups control the outskirts of Port-au-Prince in communes such as Croix-des-Bouquets. A confidential report shared with the authors by a civil society organization working on the ground describes a spate of sexual violence that occurred from the end of September through October 2022, during which some women were raped for days by members of the Canaan, 400 Marozo, and Kraze Baryè gangs. The horrific attacks took place mostly, but not exclusively, during a five-week blockade of National Road #1, which is the only access road to at least four departments in the country and to the Dominican Republic. According to witnesses, rape victims ranged in age from 8 to 60, with many of the perpetrators being children themselves. There were reports that families were forced to watch the assaults, and that men and boys were forced to have sexual relations with mothers, sisters, or other women in their families.

Other incidents of sexual violence, including gang rapes, occurred during confrontations between the 400 Marozo—affiliated with G-Pép—and G9-allied Kraze Baryè gangs, but from the testimonies of the victims it is difficult

to discern the perpetrators. What is clear is that gangs are increasingly using rape to control territory.

Despite the difficulty of documenting these cases, some additional statistics are available. Haiti's Single Health Information System recorded **16,470 cases** of GBV in 2022. In 2023, RNDDH conducted a **300-person survey** on the impact of violence in Cité Soleil and the adjacent neighborhoods of Bel-Air and Carrefour Feuilles, all of which are heavily affected by gang violence. Of the 225 women who participated, 78 reported having been raped. In addition, 72 percent of respondents reported that they had witnessed rapes and gang rapes. The UN Population Fund (UNFPA) recorded at least **5,587 cases of GBV in 2023**, an increase of over 49 percent compared with 2022 data, noting that these numbers only include the cases that UNFPA itself documented. Similarly, Doctors Without Borders said it **supported 3,700 survivors** of sexual violence and intimate partner violence in 2023, a 42 percent increase from the previous year.

The current year has seen yet another dramatic increase in GBV cases. There were 250 reported cases of GBV in January and February 2024, and **1,543** in March. The latter number coincides with a new surge of gang violence that broke out on February 29, when G9 and G-Pép formed a coalition called Viv Ansanm (Living Together) and declared the start of a **"revolution."** Their goal was to prevent the return to Haiti of Henry—who was visiting Kenya to negotiate its support for the MSS—and to overthrow the government. Viv Ansanm, which collectively controls at least **80 percent** of the metropolitan area of Port-au-Prince, created chaos in the capital, with a wave of brutality that caught many people already used to endemic levels of violence by **surprise**. Of the 1,793 reported GBV cases in the **first quarter of 2024**, 75 percent were cases of sexual violence and approximately 94 percent were reported by women and girls, marking a clear indication of the gender-based component of this type of crime. As the year progresses, GBV cases are **continuing to rise** even as the reported number of **battles has gone down** from 60 events in March, to 23 in April, and 17 in June. More recently, the UNFPA's **August 2024 report** on the situation in Haiti found that from March to May 2024, there was an approximate 40 percent rise in the number of reported GBV cases.

Accurately determining the rate of increase in sexual violence in Haiti is challenging due to several factors: the absence of government institutions, gang control over

many affected areas, victims' inability to report incidents, a lack of consistent reporting and data collection mechanisms, ongoing stigma around such cases, and a history of repercussions for those who come forward. However, piecing together reports from different UN agencies, local and international human rights organizations, and general societal perception based on extensive desk research and key informant interviews, an important conclusion can be drawn: in areas with less gang conflict, there are **fewer registered cases** of GBV.

A subtext to the high rates of sexual violence in today's gang-dominated Haiti are other forms of GBV that impact Haitian women, the **LGBTQ+ community**, and, to a lesser extent, men and boys, which remain underreported and often invisible. In 2021, Haiti ranked **163 out of 170** countries on the UN Development Program's Gender Inequality Index (GII), a **composite metric** of gender inequality using three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment, and the labor market. According to the UNFPA, **29 percent** of women of childbearing age have suffered physical violence, and in 45 percent of the cases, the violence is perpetrated by their intimate partner. Additionally, 34 percent of women in relationships are survivors of domestic violence, with 37 percent of these cases resulting in serious injuries. As socioeconomic pressures increase, intrafamily violence **also tends to rise**, so these rates are likely even higher as the country experiences a deep economic crisis. The economic roles that Haitian women occupy expose them to heightened risks of GBV. For instance, women who work as vendors in markets or engage in informal trade are often targeted for extortion, harassment, and physical violence, which restricts their ability to earn a living.

In addition, two separate sources interviewed by the authors, both working at civil society organizations that provide psychosocial support, medical referrals, and income-generating training to help women victims of GBV, described incidents of sexual violence also occurring in displacement camps, many of them in informal settings such as schools. According to the sources, such violence is often perpetrated by camp authorities. Many of these vulnerable camp residents had also previously been the victims of gang violence, including GBV.

Haiti has seen an alarming increase in the systematic use of sexual violence in recent years, reflecting both the deepening political instability and the pervasive control exerted by gangs. The use of sexual violence, historically

linked to state-sponsored actions, has now become a common tactic among various armed groups, signifying a shift in how power and control are exerted. As the situation has worsened amid the near-absence of government institutions and growing gang influence, the ability to document and address these crimes has diminished, making it increasingly challenging to provide protection and justice to victims. Without significant intervention and efforts to stabilize the political and social landscape, the cycle of violence, including sexual violence, is likely to continue, further entrenching the suffering of Haiti's most vulnerable populations.

WHAT COMES NEXT?

The international community has been slow to respond to the October 2022 **request** by the Haitian government for military assistance to help the country address its humanitarian and security crisis caused by the gangs. It was not until late June 2024 that the first 400 Kenyan police officers of the MSS started deploying to Haiti, after legal and logistical hurdles delayed the mission. These officers are the advance group of the planned **deployment** of 1,500 Kenyan police officers and more than 1,000 personnel from other African countries and nations in the Caribbean. This is a much smaller force than the **12,500 personnel** deployed under MINUSTAH. The MSS faces questions over **accountability** and over the lack of human rights **safe-guards**, especially given abuses by personnel from previous international missions in Haiti, and violations of human rights by the **police in Kenya**.

One civil society worker on the ground in Haiti interviewed by the authors feared the arrival of the MSS would increase cases of GBV, as the MSS and the Haitian National Police (HNP) contest the gangs for control of certain key areas. This was not, the source explained, because they automatically feared the MSS might have some bad apples that could commit crimes, but rather because the gangs also protect certain women and girls from GBV by rival groups. If they lose control of the neighborhoods to the MSS or the HNP, it would leave some people more vulnerable. Recognizing the need to strengthen the mission's human rights safeguards, Canada—which along with the United

States, France, and Spain is financing the mission—has **announced** it will provide training for MSS officers and establish mechanisms to prevent abuses, including sexual and gender-based violence.

Despite the apparent shortcomings of the MSS, for many it remains the only hope for now that together with the HNP, a measure of security against the gangs can be provided, creating the necessary conditions for elections to take place. Yet, as **progress stalls and funding remains limited**, the United States is increasingly considering advocating for a traditional UN peacekeeping mission. However, this move would require approval from the UN Security Council, where countries such as China and Russia may be reluctant to approve it, preferring to let the crisis on the United States' doorstep fester. The creation of a nine-member Transitional Presidential Council (TPC) in April 2024 offers additional hope that, despite a **shaky start** to its work, this new body can—as the Caribbean Community stated—**put Haiti** “back on the road to dignity, democratic legitimacy, stability and sovereignty and to ensure the proper functioning of the State's institutions.” Garry Conille, the interim prime minister appointed in June by the TPC, is tasked with organizing elections in **February 2026**.

Grassroots movements involved in documenting GBV cases and providing a wide range of services to victims under harrowing circumstances offer some other glimmers of hope. The GBV Subcluster in Haiti and the UNFPA conducted a rapid mapping assessment of women's rights organizations working in this field as of April 2024.¹

They identified **24 organizations**, including small, informal, community-driven initiatives where women have united around common challenges and shared experiences. This demonstrates that even under the current challenging circumstances, the local population is active and bringing services to many areas that traditional aid agencies cannot reach. A third of the mapped organizations are more established service providers that have a mandate to provide emergency relief and services such as psychosocial support, temporary shelter, and **dignity kits**. Haitian women's grassroots movements provide much of the glue that holds society together, leading political and social initiatives and advocating for change, even as they

1. Subclusters are specialized groups within the broader cluster system in humanitarian response, focusing on specific sectors or issues to coordinate and enhance targeted assistance and support in emergency situations.

disproportionately bear the brunt of violence and hardship. They were instrumental in creating the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Rights, securing a constitutional mandate for a 30 percent quota for women in public service, and passing laws that classify rape as a crime and criminalize sex and labor trafficking.

Despite women's crucial role in Haitian politics, Haiti's TPC consists entirely **of male voting members**, with only one woman, Régine Abraham, serving as a non-voting observer. Recently, Conille **appointed** four women to key positions, including the heads of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Economy and Finance. While this is a step in the right direction, involving more women will be crucial to a smooth political transition that works to ensure security for all citizens, including addressing the unique needs of women and girls and combating gender-based violence.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The interim government headed by Conille faces many competing priorities to consolidate the security situation, rebuild the country's institutions and economy, and organize elections. Reducing GBV cannot be an afterthought, either in the run-up to a new democratically elected government or after it takes office.

The first goal has to be a level of credible law enforcement that begins to provide protection to Haitian women and girls. Barring the restoration of a basic level of security, it will be impossible to take the steps recommended below to address the scourge of GBV in the longer term. With this in mind, the following are some steps that could help improve Haiti's dire GBV situation:

1. Establish a GBV Committee within the Haitian Cabinet

A GBV committee should be established within the Haitian cabinet, composed of relevant ministers whose mandates cover preventive, restorative, educational, and judicial aspects of GBV. This committee should have a clear mandate and leadership to ensure accountability and coordination of cross-cutting efforts to reduce GBV. Integrating this committee's initiatives with local NGOs and community organizations, which have established trust and experience in the field, will help create a unified national strategy to combat GBV.

2. Prioritize Accurate and Comprehensive GBV Data Collection

It is imperative to prioritize the accurate and comprehensive collection of data on various forms of GBV, including sexual violence, while ensuring victim protection. Implementing secure digital reporting tools and partnering with international organizations experienced in data collection can enhance the safety and reliability of the data. It is essential that the data collected identify specific perpetrators, because understanding who commits these acts and recognizing patterns is vital for developing effective countermeasures. The data should be shared publicly on a regular basis to raise public awareness and apply pressure on authorities to act based on documented evidence.

3. Implement Comprehensive Community-Level Sensitization and Education

A consistent recommendation from local Haitian organizations highlights the need for comprehensive community-level sensitization education about GBV. This should include launching educational campaigns to raise awareness about GBV and its impact, conducting workshops to educate communities on recognizing and reporting GBV, and engaging local leaders to foster supportive environments for victims. This will help end the stigma and fear that prevents many from reporting and will encourage communities to support victims instead of blaming them. Tailoring these campaigns to specific demographics, including men, youth, and religious leaders, and using appropriate language and channels will enhance their effectiveness.

4. Conduct Ground-Level Research and Expand Support Systems

More ground-level research can provide necessary insights to address GBV's root causes and create tailored prevention and support strategies. This research should be conducted in partnership with local universities, research institutions, and grassroots organizations to leverage local knowledge and networks. Establishing or expanding community-based support systems is critical, including delivering timely medical care and counseling, creating safe spaces, and providing temporary support and accommodation. A network of

support services—such as hotlines, mobile health units, and community-based paralegal support—would help provide accessible help for victims and empower communities to address GBV effectively and reduce its stigma.

5. Commit to Long-Term Gender Equality Initiatives

To achieve a sustained reduction in GBV, there must be a long-term commitment to address gender inequality in Haiti. This includes increasing women’s representation in political and decisionmaking roles, empowering women through economic opportunities, and providing education for both men and women on gender equality. Implementing strategies that focus on dismantling centuries of gender inequality will foster societal change across all levels, ultimately leading to a significant decrease in GBV. Sexual violence should not overshadow other forms of GBV, which contribute to the oppression and marginalization of Haitian women.

6. Strengthen Confidence in Haiti’s Police and Judiciary

Significant efforts should be made to build confidence in Haiti’s police and judiciary when it comes to their commitment and ability to investigate and prosecute GBV cases. Part of the **solution** is to reform state practices, laws, and institutions on preventing GBV, which fall well short of Haiti’s human rights obligations. Other efforts should include effective training for all judicial actors, including the HNP, on the seriousness of the crimes and on appropriate investigative methods to reduce impunity levels and further victimization of survivors.

7. Integrate a Gender Component in the Multinational Security Support Mission

The MSS in Haiti should include a specific gender component. This would involve training the HNP and MSS members to recognize and respond to

GBV, establishing protocols for protecting women and girls, and collaborating with local women’s organizations to ensure culturally sensitive approaches. Understanding the distinct threats faced by women and integrating gender-focused strategies in the mission’s work will enhance its effectiveness in restoring security in Haiti. Ground-level insights will be crucial for tailoring these efforts to the local context. ■

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This brief is made possible by the generous support of the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs at the U.S. Department of State.

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