

August 20, 2024

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken:

As organizations with decades of experience in Haiti, we are writing to express our concerns about the plan for the Multinational Security Support (MSS) mission to Haiti. We have three main concerns. First, we would like the U.S. and international community to ensure that beyond simply providing security for elections, the MSS has a role in a larger plan to support the development of Haitian democracy and autonomy. Second, we would like MSS officials to clearly state that their priority is the protection of Haitian lives, and disclose plans to ensure respect for human rights. And third, the U.S. must ensure that there are concrete, public mechanisms for accountability for members of the MSS force should they abuse the rights of Haitians, in accordance with the authorizing resolution from the UN Security Council.

1. A long-term vision for security and democracy in Haiti

The [MSS's mandate](#) is to support the Haitian police to “reestablish security in Haiti,” and “build security conditions conducive to the holding of free and fair elections.” Yet Election Day cannot be the only goal. Elections without other transformations will suppress, rather than address, root problems—and will not produce legitimate leadership or create conditions for long-term security.

The MSS can only succeed if it is coupled with a parallel effort to address the cause of Haiti’s current problems: the reliance of corrupt and criminally connected political leaders on gangs to retain power. The UN has reported that [top government officials have funded and armed gangs](#) and Haitian human rights organizations have shown [the complicity of police officials](#). Some political actors linked to the current transition government [have connections with gangs](#). The MSS can only succeed if there is also a focused effort to disentangle criminality from politics. This should be led by Haitians and supported by the international community, including through investments in transitional justice.

The recent [UN Security Council resolution on Haiti](#), penned by the U.S. with Ecuador, advocates “severing links between political and economic actors and gangs.” We now need to engage Haitian civil society leaders already advocating for this transformation and together develop a clearly articulated plan.

The U.S. should work with Haitian civil society and credible members of the transition government to jointly develop a plan for restoring democracy and security by severing the links among politicians, gangs, and high-ranking government officials—and clearly defining the MSS’ contribution toward achieving this goal.

2. Protecting Haitians' human rights must be the top priority

While the MSS's mandate focuses on countering gangs, securing infrastructure, and unblocking the flow of aid, the protection of Haitian lives must be the top priority. Haitians have experienced trauma from the enormous violence in the last several years—murders, kidnappings, sexual attacks, displacement, and starvation. Their rights must be protected.

Ensuring people's protection should include respect for "cultures, norms and traditions," as the Status of Forces agreement promises. Haiti and Kenya both also committed to those ideals when they each ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which guarantees the freedom to practice one's own religion, and not be coerced to adopt another. This is important to keep in mind, as the Kenyan president and first lady have consulted with evangelical pastors who have demonized Haitian religious, spiritual, and cultural practices.

The U.S. should ensure that the MSS prioritizes the protection of Haitian lives and rights and centers Haitians' needs in its planning, through consultation with civil society organizations and communities where the force operates.

3. Need for oversight and accountability

Brian A. Nichols, Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs, has said the MSS will have [robust accountability mechanisms](#). The UN Security Council resolution that authorized the MSS contains clear and specific language calling for accountability mechanisms for the force. However, the Status of Forces agreement between Kenya and Haiti does not include these safeguards—in fact, though it mostly replicates the standard UN agreement for a peacekeeping force, it offers *less* oversight. It does not include a standard clause calling for a "standing claims commission," an independent body that would review any claims that members of the mission caused personal injury, illness or death. There have been no further public details of any accountability plans.

The U.S. government, as the key initiator of the MSS, should press the Security Council to assume an active role in guaranteeing accountability for the force it authorized.

As the force's main funder and organizer, the U.S. should also help create accountability mechanisms in consultation with Haitian civil society, based on lessons learned from past interventions. They should be clearly communicated to Haitians, and should at minimum include an independent claims commission that could receive, oversee and investigate Haitian claims of abuse, along with a trust fund to compensate victims.

The steps we recommend here will help realize our shared goal for the MSS—that it creates conditions for long-term security and democracy to emerge in Haiti.

We would appreciate meeting to discuss these issues further.

Sincerely,

Alternative Chance

American Jewish World Service (AJWS)

Ansara Family Fund

Church of the Brethren, Office of Peacebuilding and Policy

Community Coalition for Haiti

The Episcopal Church

Faith in Action International

Friends Committee on National Legislation

Global Justice Clinic, NYU School of Law*

Haiti H2O: Hope to Opportunity

Haitian Women's Collective

Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti (IJDH)

International Human Rights Clinic, Harvard Law School

Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

Mennonite Central Committee U.S.

Presbyterian Church (USA), Office of Public Witness

Quixote Center

Unitarian Universalist Service Committee

CC: Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin; National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan; Ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield

**This communication does not purport to represent the institutional views, if any, of New York University.*