

# The Stabilization Process in Haiti: A Work in Progress

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**W**hen considering the progress of the stabilization process in Haiti and what is required for it to succeed, one is reminded of two Haitian folk proverbs.

The first, *Deyè mòn, gen mòn* (beyond the mountains, there are more mountains), is a sobering comment on the reality that life includes many challenges, and that we must show patience, endurance and readiness to take them in stride. The second, *men anpil, chay pa lou* (where there are many hands, the load becomes lighter) is a more reassuring reminder that even when the tasks ahead of us seem most daunting, we can succeed if we work together.

These two proverbs together encapsulate two central lessons that emerge from my experience over the two years since I assumed my present functions as Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH).

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In September 2007, Haiti appeared to be moving swiftly and smoothly toward the consolidation of its stability. The country had made substantial progress since June 2004, when a United Nations peacekeeping operation began to deploy. During this period, an elected government under President René Préval had taken office, and had demonstrated its intention to strengthen democracy and respect for human rights and to combat corruption. The Haitian authorities had endorsed and collaborated with United Nations peacekeepers in a series of operations to uproot the gangs that had exercised a reign of terror over the capital, Port-au-Prince. They had begun to lay the foundations for institutional reform programs, through the adoption of national blueprints. In each of these areas, the Mission, under the leadership of my predecessors Juan Gabriel Valdes and Edmond Mulet, had made a significant and appreciated contribution.

And yet, within the succeeding months, Haiti once again emerged as an area of serious concern for the international community. A rise in the prices of staples in the winter of 2007-2008 exacerbated public frustration and generated a series of destructive demonstrations across the country. This in turn paved the way for a vote of no-confidence in April 2008 against the incumbent government of Prime Minister Jacques-Edouard Alexis, and led to a prolonged period of political vacuum.

A further, catastrophic blow fell upon Haiti in the summer of 2008, as a series of hurricanes devastated the country. In less than four weeks, they left behind almost 1,000

dead and hundreds of thousands displaced, and inflicted widespread destruction of goods and infrastructure that was equivalent to 15 percent of Haiti's gross domestic product.

By September 2008, most casual observers would have said that Haiti's situation seemed bleak indeed. And yet today, 12 months later, stabilization is widely viewed to be moving forward once again, despite the remaining challenges. Indeed, there has been significant progress over the last 12 months. This is the product of hard work by the Haitian authorities, and the strong support of the international community.

The recently issued report of the Secretary-General on the work of MINUSTAH (S/2009/439) provides an update on the stabilization process in terms of advances toward five linked and inter-dependent "benchmarks" that were endorsed last year by the Security Council. These concern:

- ◆ political dialogue and elections
- ◆ the extension of State authority
- ◆ ensuring security
- ◆ strengthening the rule of law and human rights; and
- ◆ socio-economic development.

A review of progress in each of these areas offers a means to assess where the stabilization process stands today, and where key challenges remain.

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### Political Dialogue

Political dialogue lies at the heart of the stabilization process. A peacekeeping operation can succeed only if there is a genuine will for change within the host country.

The efforts by President Préval, Prime Minister Michèle Pierre-Louis and the Haitian government to foster constructive dialogue are most encouraging in this regard. These include the President's establishment of a series of broad-based commissions on issues of national interest, which bring together scholars with representatives of the private sector and civil society. The reports they have issued to date, on reform of the Constitution, the strengthening of Haiti's security structures, and the creation of a business-friendly environment, are already helping to generate inclusive discussions on the country's future.

We also saw, at the end of last year, a much-needed improvement in collaboration between the executive and legislative branches of government. This permitted the adoption of key legislation, including financial laws that enabled cancellation of the bulk of Haiti's international debt (\$1.2 billion). Meanwhile, it is hoped that the recent replenishment of the Senate through elections in June may pave the way for more effective action by the Parliament, which frequently lacked a quorum in the past.

At a time when Haiti enjoys a valuable opportunity to advance, these positive trends must be strengthened. The country cannot afford renewed political and institutional paralysis of the kind that afflicted it in 2008. It is critical that all branches of government enhance collaboration, avoid inflammatory language, and jointly assume responsibility for hard decisions. Such cooperation is indispensable to identify and implement solutions to urgent problems, to pursue the fight against impunity and corruption, and to ensure the stable governance that is required for development.

The international community can contribute by showing strong support for those who place national interest above narrow personal ambitions, in addition to providing funding for the legislative and Presidential elections scheduled to be held next year. Civil society too has a responsibility to engage, to ensure the sustainability and legitimacy of decisions that affect the entire Haitian people.

#### Extension of State Authority

Second, in the area of extension of State authority, some progress has been made in enhancing Haiti's institutional capacity.

The Mission is contributing within its limited means, by providing expertise to key ministries, local governance and border management. Working with the Haitian authorities, MINUSTAH has supported reforms that have increased customs revenue and enhanced local management of resources. Bilateral partners and international organizations are supporting a number of other capacity-building initiatives.

However, all of these initiatives combined represent a fraction of what is required to enable the State to deliver basic services to the population, as is critical for lasting stability. Haiti's governance structures remain gravely eroded by years of political instability and the ensuing mass emigration by many of the country's most qualified and experienced professionals. A major effort will be required to make real progress in this area, combining political will and leadership by the Haitian authorities, and focused support by the international community.

#### Security

Third, in the area of security, the past year has seen continued progress in addressing threats in rural and urban areas, and further development of Haiti's own security capabilities. MINUSTAH worked with the national authorities to undertake a variety of tasks, including focused anti-gang operations; promoting security along the land and maritime border; anti-kidnapping actions; response to civil unrest and ad-hoc threats; and regular patrolling throughout the country, including in remote areas.

Meanwhile, the Mission has also supported the strengthening of the Haitian National Police (HNP), which constitutes a critical element in MINUSTAH's "exit strategy." The HNP now comprises nearly 10,000 officers, including 468 new officers who graduated in August. Mid-level and senior HNP officers are receiving advanced training, in

part through bilateral scholarships. MINUSTAH is working with Haiti's partners to support national programs to enhance the HNP's institutional capacity and infrastructure.

This progress is encouraging, and should contribute to investor confidence. However, a premature drawdown would not be prudent. The kinds of threats faced over the past year remain present, and could be manipulated to achieve personal or political objectives, including in the context of forthcoming electoral processes. Potential spoilers are likely to exploit any indication of weakness or disengagement.

At a time when the HNP does not yet have the capacity to respond without assistance, the continued presence of international troops and police remains indispensable to consolidate the gains that have been achieved, and to ensure continued progress. Accordingly, the Secretary-General has recommended retention of the Mission's security component at a broadly similar level for a further year, but with adjustments to its configuration. These include repatriation of a number of armored personnel carriers, and an associated reduction of 120 troops in our military component, down to a total of 6,940. At the same time, he has suggested an increase of 120 officers in our police component, to bring all formed police units up to standard strength; this would bring our police component to 2,211 officers. These measures would lower the Mission's profile, while increasing its flexibility, and maintaining its capacity to respond effectively to possible threats over the coming 12 months.

Simultaneously, further efforts must be made to address significant shortfalls in the HNP's equipment, especially outside of Port-au-Prince, and to increase its financial resources and managerial capacity. In order to achieve the timelines established in national reform plans, it is essential that the Haitian authorities continue to prioritize the necessary political decisions, while continuing to benefit from strong and sustained support from MINUSTAH and bilateral donors.

#### Strengthening of Other Rule-of-Law Institutions and Protection of Human Rights

Fourth, we have seen further advances toward the strengthening of other rule-of-law institutions and protection of human rights, following national blueprints, and drawing on commitment by Haiti's leadership.

In the area of justice, Haiti's school for magistrates is now up and running, after being closed for a number of years. It is important that the recruitment of the first class of magistrates be expedited, taking full advantage of this new resource. Likewise, it is hoped that the supervisory body for the judiciary (the CSPJ), which will exercise a critical oversight function, will soon be put in place. In the area of corrections, the construction of a new prison near Port-au-Prince and the rehabilitation of other facilities are underway; this is an important initial step toward a response to the urgent problem of extreme prison over-crowding. More also needs to be done to strengthen the *Office du Protecteur du Citoyen*, which will play a key role in promoting respect for human rights.

The creation of a solid and independent institutional framework to protect the legal and human rights of the Haitian people, and to curb the threats posed by corruption and illicit trafficking, is a *sine qua non* for durable stability. At the same time, it is important to bear in mind that such systemic change does not lend itself to a “quick fix.” The progress that has been achieved to date should be seen as an incremental advance within a long-term endeavor that demands sustained Haitian leadership and international support.

### Socio-economic Development

The fifth area of the stabilization process, socio-economic development, is not the core business of peacekeeping operations. However, there is a strong linkage between security, stability and development. Peacekeeping operations can help create the conditions for development; and at the same time, stabilization cannot succeed unless there is some prospect of tangible improvement in the daily lives of the Haitian people.

The Mission has worked closely with the United Nations Country Team and donors to highlight the need for a “peace dividend.” The creation of several thousand temporary jobs through labor-intensive projects over the past year has been of significant help in sustaining hope and injecting desperately needed cash into Haiti’s economy. Further, generous assistance along these lines will remain essential for the foreseeable future.

MINUSTAH has sought to bear these concerns in mind as it pursues its own mandated tasks. The priorities of our engineering component are of course dictated by the operational needs of the Mission; but, at the same time, their work to repair basic infrastructure or respond to urgent needs can also make a difference in people’s lives, and can strengthen relations between the Mission and the community where it serves.

Meanwhile, it is vital that further efforts be made to lay the foundations for long-term progress, based around the revival of private-sector activity.

Today, we see a window of opportunity. Haiti’s inherent advantages as an area for investment have been highlighted repeatedly over the past year, including through studies by the eminent Oxford economist Paul Collier. Efforts to generate growth have been given a further, invaluable boost by the engagement of former US President Clinton as United Nations Special Envoy. President Clinton brings extraordinary attributes to this task, including his unique prestige, his dynamism and his long-standing commitment to Haiti. He has already undertaken a series of visits and public engagements to promote progress. Most recently, he co-chaired with Luis Alberto Moreno, who is the President of the Inter-American Development Bank, an “international business conference” in Port-au-Prince on October 1-2, which drew together an unprecedented number of businessmen from Haiti and abroad, and which, it is hoped, may bear fruit in jump-starting investment and job creation.

At the same time, it is critical that the Haitian leadership continue to reach out to the private sector and take the additional regulatory measures needed to create an environment which is genuinely conducive to business. The legalization of dual nationality,

as recommended by the executive and legislative branches of government during their ongoing review of the Constitution, could be of great assistance by encouraging the engagement of Haitians abroad, who remain deeply attached to their country.

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Despite the progress described above, much remains to be done.

Events over the past two years have highlighted the reality that stability is built slowly, that setbacks are to be expected, and that we can move swiftly from a situation where success appears certain, to a moment of crisis where failure seems almost inevitable.

But at the same time, they have also shown that if the Haitian leadership and people persevere and “stay the course,” and if they receive the strong support they need from the international community, progress is possible.

They remind us that Haitians and their international partners cannot afford to lose confidence before the challenges that lie ahead. We cannot take the gains that have been made for granted, but must work together to nurture and consolidate them.

Over the past two years, we have been repeatedly reminded of the extraordinary potential of this country and its remarkable people. Today, Haiti has a unique chance to realize this potential. I am confident that, with the continuing engagement of the Haitian leadership, and with the sustained assistance of the international community, the stabilization process will succeed, and the Haitian people can look forward to the better future to which they have aspired for so long.