

# NOREF Report

## Relations between Haiti and the Dominican Republic

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### Executive summary

Haiti and the Dominican Republic (DR), the two adjacent countries that comprise the island of Quisqueya, have wide asymmetries and similarities. Due to poverty, nearly a third of Haitians migrate in search of work, including to the DR, and Haiti relies on foreign assistance for food security. The DR's economy exhibits considerable dynamism, but depends on cheap labour from Haiti and remittances from its own expatriates. Both countries have a common habitat and ecosystem, and their populations have a large proportion of youth.

The goodwill that followed Dominican help to Haiti after the 2010 earthquake had largely dissipated by 2011, as Dominican deportations and harsher measures regarding migrants reawoke old grievances. Presidents Martelly (Haiti) and Fernández (DR) have met several times, but these gestures need to be coupled with consistent efforts to address issues of bilateral concern. Haiti should set in place the required administrative capacity for

co-operation, possibly through the Mixed Bilateral Commission.

The Haitian-Dominican agenda has several areas of great potential. Each country is the second most important trading partner of the other; private investment is creating opportunities for employment on both sides of the border; the protection of the ecosystem and natural disaster prevention are considered priorities by both governments; and interaction between the two countries' state institutions, academics and civil society has helped to reduce mutual prejudice and foster co-operation. Binational dialogue should also address the situation of Haitian migrants, mainly by seeking ways to prevent abuses and providing personal documents to persons of Haitian origin born or living in the DR and to temporary migrants. International donors should continue to play a key role in supporting projects related to these issues.

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# 1. Historical background

Haiti and the Dominican Republic (DR), the two adjacent countries that make up the island of Quisqueya,<sup>2</sup> have widely different, although closely linked histories in which war and mutual tensions are interspersed with instances of neighbourly solidarity. This record reflects both countries' past and evolution, and influences their self-perception and sense of each other to this day.

The first foothold of the Spanish Crown in the Americas, Quisqueya was colonised in the expectation of finding gold, a hope soon proven to be unfounded, but which led to the over-exploitation and near extinction of the native population, followed by the introduction of African slaves. As most Spaniards departed for richer lands, various settlements remained in the sparsely populated plains in the east of the island, turning to cattle breeding and some sugar cane production, without expanding to the mountainous western region.

As part of the European race for dominance in the New World, the western part of the territory was conquered by France in 1655, while the eastern part, Dominica, remained under Spanish rule. Language, culture and social organisation differed in each colony. The French set up labour-intensive coffee, cotton and sugar plantations to produce crops for export to Europe. Colonists acquired up to 40,000 African slaves a year: in 1804 the population of the French colony totalled half a million slaves under the control of 30,000 whites and 35,000 mulattoes. Dominica, by contrast, had only about 100,000 inhabitants.<sup>3</sup>

In 1791 the slaves of west Quisqueya rebelled and, under the leadership of Toussaint Louverture, established Haiti in 1804, the first free black republic and the second independent nation in the Americas. Challenging a system based on slavery came at a high cost for Haiti. The Napoleonic wars in Europe spread to the island and Louverture was imprisoned for life. Revolutionary leader Jean-Jacques Dessalines

retaliated with a scorched earth policy and an order to kill all whites. Cornered by the colonial powers and a policy of isolation from other American nations, Haiti agreed to pay France 150 million francs for damages caused by the rebellion, a taxing burden on the country's economy for years to come. To consolidate independence, in 1822 President Jean-Pierre Boyer occupied Santo Domingo, reunifying the island with the support of Dominican colonists opposed to Spanish control. The occupation continued until 1844 and was followed by 19 years of intermittent war. Dominicans returned to Spanish rule, but would later rebel to gain independence in 1865, a goal achieved with support from Haiti, one of the instances of solidarity between the two neighbours throughout their troubled history.

Instability, concern over outstanding debts and the possibility of a German base being established in the Caribbean at the start of the First World War caused the U.S. to occupy the two countries for about 20 years starting in 1915 under separate, although interconnected administrations. U.S. companies laid out vast sugar plantations in the DR; in Haiti, thousands of workers were transported across the border, signalling the beginning of the uninterrupted flow of migrants that continues to this day. The human imports would be institutionalised under Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo, who bought the country's sugar interests in the 1930s. As sugar prices plummeted in the wake of the Great Depression, Trujillo deported waves of migrants and stirred up anti-Haitian sentiment. In 1937 he ordered a massacre of Haitians, which he portrayed as a reaction by local farmers to the former's alleged abuses. Ordered to search for Haitians and kill them whenever they were found, Dominican soldiers using machetes and knives killed at least 15,000 of them, leaving many more mutilated.

Weak or dictatorial governments in Port-au-Prince failed to react forcibly to these abuses, while benefitting handsomely from the sale of their own citizens in conditions akin to servitude. Under the Haitian dictatorships of Francois Duvalier and his son Jean-Claude (1957–86) and of Trujillo's adviser and successor, Joaquín Balaguer, the countries entered into regular contracts to ensure a steady supply of labour for the plantations.

<sup>2</sup> The island is commonly called Hispaniola or Quisqueya. This report will use the name Quisqueya.

<sup>3</sup> Michele Wucker, *Why the Cocks Fight*, New York, Hill & Wang, 1999.

Two developments would heavily influence bilateral relations: in the 1980s the fall of sugar prices and the ensuing diversification and growth of the Dominican economy and in the 1990s the accession to power of freely elected presidents in both countries. In 1998 Leonel Fernández took the unprecedented step of paying a state visit to his Haitian counterpart, René Préval. Fernández's successor, Hipólito Mejía, also sought to improve relations, including through the establishment of an investment fund for the border area.

Haiti's development, however, continued to be undermined by political polarisation, instability and extreme poverty, a situation that in 2004 led to President Aristide's second forced departure from the country and the ongoing United Nations (UN) intervention. The latter started after the 1991 coup d'état against Aristide while serving his first term in office. Since 2004 the UN Security Council has maintained a peacekeeping operation in the country, the UN Stabilisation Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH).

## 2. The state of relations today

Economic, environmental and migration trends provide some clues about how best to put binational relations on a more predictable and co-operative path.

A comparison of both countries' data reveals striking asymmetries and several similarities. Haiti has roughly ten million inhabitants in a territory of 27,000 square kilometres, which is slightly more people than the DR in a country almost twice the size (48,000 square kilometres), and a gross domestic product (GDP) that in 2010 was less than an eighth that of the DR. Nearly one-third of Haitians live outside the country, some in the DR, which in turn has a large outflow of migrants. World Bank estimates in 2010 put remittances at \$293 million (21.2% of GDP) for Haiti and \$140 million (7% of GDP) for the DR.<sup>4</sup>

Haiti relies on foreign assistance even for its food security. The DR's economy, by contrast, exhibits considerable dynamism, with high levels of foreign direct investment flows and openness

to regional and global integration. Although the DR's economy has grown considerably, it is still dependent on cheap labour from its poorer neighbour and, to a lesser degree, on remittances from its expatriates. The DR's double character as a recipient and originator of migrants raises complex questions regarding the burden placed by Haitian workers on the physical and social structure of a country that cannot employ some of its own nationals and where the unemployment rate for 2010 was about 14%.<sup>5</sup>

In the past decade, each country became the second most important trade partner of the other, although the exchange is nearly unidirectional. After the embargo that was imposed on the military regime in Haiti following the coup against President Aristide, Balaguer opened the border markets. Realising the advantages of being Haiti's sole suppliers, Dominican businessmen opened a trade flow by land for exports as varied as fertilisers, eggs, and construction material such as cement and steel bars. The official figure for DR exports to Haiti now totals \$700 million per year, although several sources indicate that it goes well beyond \$1,000 million.<sup>6</sup> The lack of a transparent customs system – with frequent instances of corruption on both sides of the border – would explain the gap. Exchanges also take place in the markets near the 360 km-long border, three of which have reached a relatively significant volume.<sup>7</sup>

The involvement of Dominican businesses in Haiti has been significant, as evidenced by the fact that Haiti's main road connecting the capital to Cap-Haitien was recently inaugurated after three years of rehabilitation by Dominican road-building firm Estrella.<sup>8</sup> The establishment of free-trade zones that employ Haitians is another trend that deserves attention. One such venture, COTAVI, has been set up in Dominican territory near the northern border city of Dajabón by the M Group of businesses. The venture currently employs 8,000 Haitians and could hire up to 12,000 within the next three years.

5 *The New York Times*, "As refugees from Haiti linger, Dominicans' good will fades", August 31st 2011.

6 Interview with Inocencio Garcia.

7 They correspond to the Dominican and Haitian localities of Dajabón-Ouanaminthe, Jimaní-Malpasse and Elías Piña-Balladere.

8 *Miami Herald*, November 28th 2011.

4 Figures taken from World Bank, Open Data, <http://data.worldbank.org/>.

Authorities in the two countries agree that joint action is required to protect their common habitat and environmental ecosystem. Both are prone to the natural disasters that hit the Caribbean zone, including hurricanes, flooding, storms, heavy rains and earthquakes, although their levels of preparedness and vulnerability differ widely. Deforestation caused by the generalised use of timber for fuel and disorderly urbanisation has left Haiti with only 3.7% of forest land as of 2010. While the DR has also been subject to rapid urbanisation, the early adoption of a decisive reforestation policy has enabled the country to retain 40.8% of its surface as forest land.<sup>9</sup>

The treatment of Haitian migrant workers in the DR cannot be ignored. The growth of the Dominican economy and the persistence of poverty in Haiti have changed the profile of migrants without reducing their numbers. In Dominican cities and tourist centres there is growing demand in construction, cleaning, domestic help or other services.<sup>10</sup> The new migrants include many young men and women, and tend to be temporary. No longer secluded in *bateyes* – the tenements built in plantations – they reside in urban slums, having thus become “visible” to Dominicans, although by no means better protected. Many have lived in the DR for years, while others were born of Haitian parents and raised in the country, but are denied citizenship, have no means of identification, are unable to undertake certain activities, and are subject to abuse and deportation, often without having a place to return to in Haiti.

Recent actions by Dominican authorities have raised alarm among Haitians. In early 2011 deportations multiplied and border patrols denied passage to anybody suspected of being Haitian. Following a constitutional reform and the approval of the regulations of the Law on Migration, the applicability of *jus solis* to migrants of Haitian origin was put on hold. The Central Electoral Council engaged in a policy of withdrawing personal documents on the mere suspicion that they had been obtained on grounds not compatible with the new interpretation, an arbitrary and retroactive application of the norm that led to accusations of “civil genocide”. While the council back-pedalled

in response to U.S. public criticism, saying that it would no longer withhold documents unless they are proven to be illegal, uncertainty still hovers over the fate of Haitian migrants in the DR, variously said to range between 800,000 and 1.5 million.<sup>11</sup>

The new regulation also requires Dominican employers to issue work contracts and obtain temporary visas for migrants. These provisions constitute a step towards a recognition of Haitian migrants’ status that should be encouraged, although co-operation from business is considered doubtful.

### 3. Mutual perceptions

War and Haitian occupation left deep scars in the Dominican psyche. The DR is the only Latin American country that celebrates its national day on the date it became independent from Haiti (February 27th) rather than from its former European master.

The human inflow from the east reawakened resentment and a fear of domination that certain political and economic elites sought to exploit to their advantage. Haitian workers were essential to the sugar industry – no one but blacks, went the argument, were as well suited to cutting cane. But they had to be kept under close surveillance and threat of deportation lest they tried to invade the country and mix with Dominicans. In his anti-Haitian campaign, Trujillo sought advice from racist intellectuals and constructed Dominican nationhood in terms of Catholicism, the white race and the country’s Spanish heritage, traits that had to be preserved at all costs. Trujillo’s close adviser, Balaguer, emphasised the need to keep the army as a custodian of the border to protect “our inalienable patrimony”.<sup>12</sup>

These words seem to resonate in the slogan of a right-wing candidate in the current ongoing Dominican political campaign: “Standing for what belongs to us.”<sup>13</sup> A small but well-placed group of businessmen and politicians, some of whom support the current government, still harbour anti-

<sup>9</sup> Figures taken from World Bank, Open Data.

<sup>10</sup> Wilfredo Lozano, *La paradoja de las migraciones*, Santo Domingo, Editorial UNIBE, FLACSO & SJRM, 2008.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Bernardo Vega.

<sup>12</sup> Wucker, *Why the Cocks Fight*, 1999.

<sup>13</sup> “*Defender lo nuestro*”, the slogan of candidate Pelegrin Castillo.

Haitian feelings, even as they continue to rely on Haitians for cheap labour. The consolidation of democracy, the relative integration of many Haitian expatriates into Dominican communities and the emergence of an active civil society denouncing abuses have done a great deal to reduce mistrust and prejudice.<sup>14</sup>

Resentment is not limited to the upper classes: the employment of Haitians keeps wages low, a fact that will likely arouse more animosity from Dominican labour as the demand for Haitian labour expands to other sectors. The media often disseminate feelings of resentment that may trigger intercommunal tensions, particularly if incidents of violence involve both nationalities. This happened after a Dominican couple was killed in the border village of Hatillo Palma in 2005, and in November 2011, when four Haitians were killed in retaliation for the suspicious death of a Dominican national in the hamlet of La Descubierta. Politicians also stoke prejudice, although the two main contenders in the current Dominican political campaign have so far refrained from playing the “Haitian card”. This is a welcome development, if one remembers that José Francisco Peña Gómez, three times candidate for the presidency, was the target of a dirty campaign based on his presumed Haitian nationality and the colour of his skin.

The plight of migrants has not always been raised forcefully by Haitian leaders. A Dominican interviewee noted that there has been a sharp disconnect between the Haitian elite and its own people, which he explained as resulting from the persistence of “codes based on the practice of slavery”.<sup>15</sup>

Whether intellectuals or not, Haitians have a deep sense of exceptionality. Despite a history of foreign occupation, they are mindful of their own fight for independence, since, as one of them noted, they feel that invaders “were unable to deprive us of our historical pride”. In the regional context, many Haitian intellectuals do not seem over-anxious to adapt to the culture, language and customs of the English-, Spanish- or Portuguese-speaking

countries of the Americas to which they have been exposed of late. This feeling permeates their attitude towards the DR, even as they recognise the need to improve relations. An interviewee noted that co-operation was nigh to impossible in the cultural field due to existing differences in the philosophical, language and cultural realms. Most Dominicans, he said, took Miami and American pop culture as a model, while Haitians preferred to look inward and preserve their own cherished cultural identity.<sup>16</sup> This feeling does not necessarily apply to younger Haitians of all social strata.

## 4. The DR’s role after the 2010 earthquake

The DR’s reaction to the earthquake that hit Haiti on January 12th 2010 was an historical turning point for the better in terms of binational co-operation. With a magnitude of 7.0 on the Richter scale, the earthquake killed more than 22,000 people, left 300,000 seriously injured and destroyed over a million homes. The presidential palace and MINUSTAH’s headquarters were among those demolished.

President Fernández of the DR was the first foreign leader to go to Port-au-Prince, arriving a mere 16 hours after the quake, surprising his Haitian counterpart in his improvised office. At an emergency cabinet meeting convened before the trip, Fernández had devised an emergency plan to provide assistance, establishing corridors for the delivery of food, shelter materials and basic health care. With the help of Dominican state and private business, antennae and radio communications enabled Préval to re-establish contact with his ministers hours after the earthquake, while electricity was restored in most of Port-au-Prince within a month. Search and rescue and medical teams were immediately sent to the border, and the DR’s health-care centres were put in their totality at the disposal of Haiti’s emergency needs. The Dominican Civil Defence, headed by a military officer, organised thousands of volunteers and was put in charge of a well-coordinated and comprehensive relief operation. Most significantly, the land border crossing at Jimaní was opened without restrictions to Haitians fleeing the disaster.

<sup>14</sup> Bridget Wooding & Richard Moseley-Williams, *Les immigrants Haïtiens et leurs descendants en République Dominicaine*, Pétion Ville, ISPOS, 2005.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Inocencio Garcia.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Jean-Max Bellerive.

Dominican solidarity was widespread and came from all sectors: government, civil society and business. All large airports in Dominican territory, including those under private administration, were opened for use by international organisations without paying fees, and aerial corridors were established. Several dozen mobile kitchens and nearly 10,000 warm food rations, bottled water, beds, sheets and fuel were transported as a donation from Banco Popular Dominicano, in co-ordination with the NGO Partners in Health. Estrella, the construction company based in the city of Santiago, sent several shipments of medicine.

For six months, mutual feelings experienced an extraordinary turnabout: highly placed Dominicans referred to their neighbours as “our brethren” and Haitians showed heartfelt gratitude for the support the DR offered.<sup>17</sup> For Dominican civil society and the thousands of volunteers who for the first time visited Haiti, in particular, there was a major change in perception and attitude towards their neighbours. For Haitians, however, the solidarity shown by the DR was somewhat diluted among aid received from many other countries. Furthermore, the increase in deportations of early 2011 seemed to turn the clock backwards. Although the capital of goodwill accumulated in the aftermath of the earthquake may have eroded, the precedent it set is a powerful reminder of solidarity and brings home the realisation that natural hazards and geography require the two countries to work together.

The central role played by the DR had an impact on its economy, due to the use of Dominican territory as a base for all international humanitarian networks and to the direct involvement of Dominican businesses in reconstruction work. The country’s GDP rose 7.7% in 2010, of which 2% was accounted for by the relief operation, according to some estimates. Up to 200,000 Haitians who crossed the border in the wake of the disaster are said to remain in Dominican territory.

## 5. The new Haitian president

President Michel Martelly has been received by Fernández several times since taking office in May 2011, an indication of the two presidents’ willingness to cement good-neighbourly relations. These gestures of goodwill need to be coupled with a consistent effort to address the issues of bilateral concern and an open spirit to see the potential that lies ahead. For Haiti, moving forward entails political will and setting in place the required administrative capacity.

Martelly’s slow pace in establishing a cabinet and setting about the tasks that Haiti so urgently needs done has raised concerns. A popular singer with no political experience, although connected to Duvalierist circles, the novice president won by a landslide in the second round of elections characterised by a low turnout and accusations of fraud, particularly during the first round. Six months into his government, not only had his errors eroded the trust placed in him by his fellow citizens, they could also call into question his true commitment to democratic practices. He has nonetheless displayed a degree of pragmatism and the ability to change course under the influence of advisers and key foreign actors, mainly from the U.S., but also from the UN.

In an apparent attempt to discredit Parliament, he proposed two candidates for prime minister knowing that they would be turned down; only on the eve of his intervention at the 2011 UN General Assembly did Martelly propose the current incumbent, Garry Conille, who is acceptable to the main political parties in Parliament. At the time of his appointment, Conille was a senior UN Development Programme (UNDP) official who had previously served as chief of staff to ex-President Clinton in the latter’s capacity as UN special envoy for Haiti. Martelly also kept a lid on ministerial appointments until their official announcement, refraining from consultations with the more experienced Conille, although the Constitution gives the prime minister a primary role in the formation of the cabinet.<sup>18</sup>

An incident that caused a dangerous inter-institutional impasse was the arrest of Congressman Arnel Bélizaire, apparently ordered

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Valerie Julliard.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with MINUSTAH official.

out of personal animosity, with no regard for parliamentary immunity or clarity on the alleged charges. While Bélizaire was soon released, the event prompted Parliament to summon cabinet ministers and announce impeachment proceedings that led to the resignation of Justice Minister Josué Pierre Louis. The worst of the crisis seems to be over, as the Senate postponed the issue until 2012 and relations between Martelly and Senate opposition leader Joseph Lambert have taken a more amicable path.

Despite setbacks, the president has shown himself not to be lacking in political acumen. He reformulated his vow to reinstate the army in the form of a decision to annul the decree that abolished it, and to create a civil commission that will submit a proposal on its future role and functions. Haitians, even those on the centre-left, seem willing to give Martelly the benefit of the doubt. While most are worried at the prospect of re-creating a body with a record of corruption and abuse, they explain the initiative as a symbolic gesture to reaffirm the country's sovereignty and independence vis-à-vis the international community.<sup>19</sup> This is something that goes down well with many Haitians, who criticised Préval for putting the country "into receivership mode".<sup>19</sup>

In this context, Martelly's visit to Cuba can be interpreted as both a reaffirmation of his independence towards the U.S. and a pragmatic gesture in regard to a country that provides vital co-operation assistance, particularly in the areas of health care and education. This sense of pragmatism can also be expected to guide Martelly's policy with regard to the DR.

In the DR, Fernández will leave office when the candidate who wins the May 2012 presidential elections takes over. Whether his successor is former president Mejía or his old chief of cabinet and fellow PLD party member Danilo Medina, the DR's policy vis-à-vis Haiti is unlikely to alter substantially. But the change of administration, the likely prospect of a slowdown of economic growth and uncertainty over Haitian' readiness to participate may hinder binational dialogue.

## 6. President Martelly's entourage

Overlapping circles of advisers and acquaintances from various origins and with various profiles surround the Haitian president. Politically, many come from prominent families under the Duvaliers – some are children of former ministers, such as Conille and Michele Oriole, a conservative historian and anthropologist. One of the intellectuals in Martelly's circle, Oriole advised him on Haiti's relations with donors and proposed not to extend the mandate of the Interim Commission for the Reconstruction of Haiti beyond October 2011. Oriole was not appointed to a ministerial position and no longer seems to be in the president's "inner circle" of advisers. Neither was Conille, although the relationship has improved of late.

Other acquaintances trace their backgrounds to neo-Duvalierism, associated with the military governments that followed Duvalier's departure in 1986. They include former officers and teammates from Duvalier's unfinished military courses who were frequent patrons of the night club he used to run. Martelly is said to be close to Michel Francois, an ex-police chief in the capital convicted of human right abuses. He tried to appoint some of these friends to police and departmental posts, but was dissuaded from doing so by then-acting Prime Minister Bellerive. The individuals in question were suspected of drug-related offences, according to U.S. sources. The first lady, Sophia Saint Remy, comes from a neo-Duvalierist family in Gonaives. The mother of Martelly's four children, she is a very influential figure, was his manager as a performer and the co-founder of Rose et Blanc, the charitable foundation that served him as a springboard for the presidential campaign.

A close friend is the minister of the interior, Thierry Mayard Paul, who studied in France, is the co-founder of a successful law firm, and has family and social connections to the white elite. While he is considered one of the president's closest advisers, rumours circulated about differences between them over the arrest of Congressman Arnel Bélizaire.

Pragmatism and ideology have influenced

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Marcus Garcia.

appointments of academics and well-experienced technicians. Daniel Suplice, a sociologist and historian who graduated in Boston, was Martelly's preferred companion in his early trips abroad and was branded as the intended candidate for the Ministry of Foreign Relations, but the president eventually appointed Laurent la Mothe. Suplice was assigned to the Ministry of Haitians Abroad, from where he will have to handle a key issue in relations with the DR, a task he seems ready to undertake.

La Mothe, from a well-to-do Port-au-Prince family (his mother was a famous painter and his father a respected scholar) graduated with degrees in political science and business from U.S. universities. Described as well focused, hard working and intelligent, he has solid links to the private sector.

In key areas of co-operation with the DR, Jude Hervé Day in the Department of Planning is described as possessing sound technical knowledge and experience. Reginald Toussaint, in the Department of the Environment, was a director under the previous administration and has already been in regular contact with his Dominican counterparts in relation to the Quisqueya Verde project. In the Department of Health, Florence Duperval Guillaume has been involved in sanitary campaigns as part of U.S. Agency for International Development projects. None was close to the president – the first two ministers were proposed by the opposition and accepted by him.

Staff from the Spanish public relations group Ostos & Sola (advisers of conservative politicians and political parties in the U.S., Spain and Latin America) were Martelly's campaign counsellors.<sup>20</sup> The group, and Daniel Merlo in particular, remains an influential adviser to the president.

## **7. The Mixed Binational Commission (Dominican-Haitian Mixed Commission)**

In 1979 the governments of Jean-Claude Duvalier and Antonio Guzmán signed a co-

operation agreement that covered trade, natural resources and research as areas of common interest, and put on record the intention to set up a Dominican-Haitian Mixed Commission. The actual establishment of the commission had to wait until 1996. Under the direction of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the DR and the Office of the Prime Minister in Haiti, the mechanism would comprise eight sectoral subcommissions and would incorporate relevant representatives from the private sector and civil society. Although agreements were reached in the areas of health, agriculture and migration, the commission remained dormant between 2000 and 2007.

In 2007 President Fernández decided to give new impetus to binational co-operation and revive the commission by creating an Executive Secretariat that would provide technical and administrative support to ministries engaged in binational co-operation, oversee the technical viability of projects, prepare them for Congressional approval in case of need, and monitor and evaluate projects under way. The Secretariat was also given the capacity to elicit action through the formulation of project proposals.

A serious impediment to the work of the commission has been the absence of counterparts on the Haitian side and the lack of a technical monitoring mechanism. This does not mean that bilateral co-operation has been non-existent: several projects and activities involving both countries were undertaken with international support, particularly in the border areas, in the environmental, health and trade sectors. They entailed binational contacts and work at the ministry-to-ministry level, but there was no co-ordination with other government offices and therefore the advantages of a unified strategy and synergies at the policy and operational levels were lacking.

In 2010 President Fernández put the Secretariat in place, appointing Ambassador Jorge Ortega Tous as its head. The Secretariat has since been working from the Foreign Ministry with a small team, financed by the Dominican government and grants from the European Union (EU) and UNDP, which also provide technical assistance.

A meeting of four of the eight subcommissions was held in October with 45 representatives

<sup>20</sup> From <http://www.aljazeera.com>.



from Haiti to discuss agreements on access roads in the context of the Green Border project. The Secretariat has several project proposals awaiting submission, including one designed to develop industrial parks that was formulated by the UN Conference on Trade and Development.

## **8. Academia and other non-governmental actors**

Meetings, exchanges and sharing of information have been taking place for some time between academics of universities from both sides. This is a good basis to continue working towards a better understanding of the issues that affect the relationship and to provide inputs for the formulation of policies based on research and analysis. President Fernández's decision to build a university in the northern area of Lemonade, near Cap-Haitien, is an opportunity to give further impetus to binational work at this level.

One of the similarities between Haiti and the DR lies in the large number of youth in both countries. Many Haitian secondary-level students have gone to the DR, particularly since the earthquake destroyed their schools, in order to continue their studies. This kind of experience creates bonds that can be valuable elements to change mutual perceptions and prejudices.

The media in both countries can play an important role in disseminating objective information and fostering awareness and support for initiatives that seek to improve binational relations. Furthermore, the diaspora (both Haitian and Dominican) represents a factor whose true potential should be taken into account.

## **9. Co-operation from the international community**

The way in which the binational relationship evolves is key to the two countries' future. The economic and business opportunities stemming from their close territorial proximity, the countries' position in the Caribbean basin and their comparative advantages are elements with much potential. Improved physical and economic

interconnectedness can be an engine for development in Haiti. In order to ensure Haiti's full political engagement and to have a meaningful binational dialogue, it will be necessary to address two contentious and difficult issues, starting at the technical level: the situation of people of Haitian origin in the DR, and the measures needed to improve customs administration and border control.

Below is an outline of the main areas of bilateral action that receive international assistance, where further co-operation may be warranted, including a role for the media and the diaspora when appropriate, and entailing the possible engagement of traditional and regional providers of co-operation.

### *The private sector*

Investors from both countries are reportedly interested in business opportunities that include buying land near coastal areas with potential for tourism, a service industry where the DR has accumulated a wealth of experience. The development of industrial parks and other economic ventures that can be a source of employment and could take advantage of each country's comparative advantages, particularly in the border area, should also attract private investment.

Dominican and Haitian investors have much to gain from better binational relations, but need clear rules and a commitment to transparency and fair practices.

### *Customs and border control*

The increasing trade flow would benefit from a more-efficient and more-transparent customs administration that would speed up delivery, be a source of revenue for the Haitian state through customs duties, and eliminate unnecessary middlemen and corruption, thus levelling the field for fair competition. Within the context of its support for trade, the environment and local development in the border area, the EU envisages the provision of assistance for the reform and strengthening of customs.

The movement of people across the border also requires an efficient administration that is ready to

ensure compliance with the provisions contained in the recently approved regulations of the Law on Migration regarding the issuing of work contracts, visas and identification.

Business representatives from both countries, with support from the EU and UNDP, have already met on issues of binational co-operation. Further exchanges could cover more investment opportunities, on the one hand, and fair commercial practices and common responsibilities, including customs, migration and the environment, on the other.

### ***Multisectoral border projects***

Long neglected, the border area has of late received much-deserved attention. Geo-strategic considerations led the Dominican government to establish an office for border development under the direction of an army general reporting directly to the president, with CESFRONT – an elite body from the army – as the security presence. There is a noticeable lack of state presence on the Haitian side.

Building on earlier assistance primarily consisting of the construction of physical infrastructure and roads in the northern corridor, the EU at present envisages a two-pronged programme that includes the further expansion of facilities along the border and projects on trade, the environment and local development in the area.

There is consensus between the two governments that the environment is a priority, and both ministries have been working with funding and support from international donors (Norway among them) on a reforestation project (Frontera Verde) that engages local communities. The preservation and development of the Artibonite basin, a river near the border that goes deep into Haitian territory to become the main source of water for irrigation and drinking, is another key initiative. Other projects involve solid waste disposal in binational markets and include productive activities, such as apiculture or pisciculture. Binational co-operation in terms of disaster prevention and management, a field where Haiti would benefit from its neighbour's capacities, is also in need of attention.

### ***Haitians living in the DR***

With support from the Organisation of American States, 4.8 million Haitians have obtained their ID cards. It is important that all citizens be given their personal documents, including those now living in the DR who have no papers. A plan to reach out to people in such a situation so that they obtain their IDs should be approved by the Haitian Ministry of Haitians Abroad and executed with the co-operation of the Ministry of Foreign Relations. The plan would require collaboration from Dominican authorities and should include a public information and education campaign for the target population.

### ***Police and parliamentary co-operation***

Under a rule-of-law project, MINUSTAH supports co-operation between the parliaments and police of the two countries. Haitian legislators visited their Dominican counterparts last year. The project includes an e-governance element that requires the digitalisation of the Haitian Parliament's files destroyed by the earthquake. Binational work on the police has led to the sharing of intelligence to combat common crime, the training of canine units and visits in situ by both chiefs.

### ***Henri Christophe University in Lemonade***

On January 12th 2012 the inauguration of the Henri Christophe University in Lemonade, near the city of Cap-Haitien, would have been a good opportunity to re-engage the academic communities from both countries (at the level of professors and students) in exchanges and studies that require common action. These could include research on issues that have a binational dimension and the formulation of an independent proposal for a binational strategy for development.

### ***Mixed Binational Commission***

Given the multisectoral character of many of the activities envisaged or under way, a well-functioning Secretariat would ensure co-ordination among the ministries and entities involved. It could also become the institutional locus for meetings with private and other non-governmental actors relevant to projects under

its purview and provide monitoring and follow-up action. Pending an indication of the Haitian's government political support for the Secretariat and its readiness to back it up with appropriate expertise, additional support for the Secretariat should be considered.

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## Annex: List of interviewees

### *In New York*

Edmond Mulet, ASG of UNDPKO

Ugo Solinas, senior officer in charge of MINUSTAH

Carina van Vliet, desk officer for Haiti, UNDPA

Mauricio Davila Morlotte, desk officer for the DR, UNDPA

Dowoti Desir, Haitian diaspora

### *In the Dominican Republic*

Bernardo Vega, academic

Antonio Paul Emil, director of Dominican-Haitian Cultural Centre

Luis Tejada and José Socias, National Directorate for Border Development

Inocencio García, director of International Co-operation, Ministry of Planning

Jorge Ortega Tous, Mixed Binational

Commission, and Patricia Dore Castillo

Enzo Di Taranto, MINUSTAH Liaison Office in Santo Domingo

Valerie Julliand, UN resident co-ordinator

Marc van Wynsberghe, UNDP adviser on border projects

Jean-Noel Gangloff and Younes Karroum, EU delegation

Fernanda Potes, Colombian Embassy (concurrent in Port-au-Prince)

### *In Haiti*

Jean-Max Bellerive, former prime minister, currently in charge of the Mixed Binational Commission

Marcus Garcia, director, Haiti en Marche

Colette Lespinasse, director, GARR

Aurélie Boukobza, Interim Commission for Haitian Reconstruction

Liz Cullity, head, Political Office, MINUSTAH

Elisabeth Sluttum, Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Ricardo Valverde, NDI Haiti