



Department of Justice, Peace and Human Development  
Office of International Justice and Peace

**Background on Haiti**  
**February 2008**

*The current Haitian society calls for a profound change in all constituents. In the name of Christ and his church, we raise up our voices to ask all Haitians to work for the advent of a new society and a new way of governing the country, with a foundation in an orderly state, moral values, and the common good.*

-- The Bishops of Haiti, September 29, 2004

**THE GENERAL SITUATION:**

A new day may be dawning for Haiti. There are steady signs that Haiti is recovering from years of corrupt government, international boycotts, the flight of businesses and the violent attacks of armed gangs. Meanwhile, the U.S. trade preferences program passed in 2006, the HOPE Act, has begun to yield modest results by creating over 4,000 jobs in the last few months. Internal security is still highly problematic, but there has been a downturn in killings and kidnappings since the early 2006 elections. An effective national police force is still in its formative stages and will require the continued presence of the nearly 2,000 international police trainers in the country.

The UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti—MINUSTAH—has been criticized for its failure to control the armed gangs with their campaign of kidnappings for ransom. MINUSTAH's original task was to disarm and demobilize the armed actors and reintegrate them into civil society, but so far has met with little success. Widespread criticism of the inaction of the UN mission resulted in a general strike called by civil society groups and allegedly led to the Brazilian force commander's suicide in early 2006. Discontent with the behavior of many of the troops is widespread, including accusations of proselytizing by some of the troops from Muslim nations. The cultural and linguistic divide between them and the Haitian people is wide and needs to be addressed by President Rene Prével's government. MINUSTAH is currently in its second five-year authorization. The UN is likely to renew the mandate when it expires in October.

The overall security situation in Haiti seems to be improving. The number of kidnappings declined by half from the end of 2006 to the end of 2007. The national police have organized and have even implemented a motorcycle brigade that is highly visible throughout the country. MINUSTAH is working with the national police to increase its current number of officers from 8,000 to 14,000 in order to ensure stability. Even so, the high cost of living continues to be very difficult for ordinary Haitians. While the situation is rather peaceful at the moment, there is talk of uprisings after the carnival festivals.

**THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH:**

The bishops of Haiti are seeking their proper role in helping that society find its way to peace and reconciliation. Catholic Relief Services' program in Haiti, one of its largest in the world, is engaged in responding to the bishops' call to help develop the Church's role in promoting lasting peace and true reconciliation. In addition, CRS and other major non-governmental organizations are playing their traditional role of providing critically needed supplies of food and medicines throughout the country.

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## **THE ROLE OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY:**

In the months after his election in 2006, President Préval completed a very successful round of meetings with the White House, the Congress, the International Monetary Fund, the United Nations, the Inter-American Development Bank and the Organization of American States. The urgent financial needs of Haiti, well known for years to all these U.S. and international bodies, may at last begin to be addressed. President Préval has called on other governments, especially those of France, Canada and the U.S., to step up long-term development aid.

At the UN, he made it clear that the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti should not be withdrawn until real security throughout the country is achieved, but he also called for a change in orientation of the mission. He stated that Haiti needs “fewer tanks and more tractors, more road-building, more construction of waterways.”

At the OAS, he promised to start a national dialogue with all the highly divided political sectors in order to forge a development framework that should last, he said, for a quarter century.

## **TRADE AND HAITI’S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:**

A significant element in Haiti’s economic development has been the modest improvements to the once vibrant apparel industry. USCCB was very engaged in seeking passage of a new trade preference program for Haiti, the Haitian Hemispheric Opportunity through Partnership Encouragement (HHOPE) Act. Coming into force in March 2007, the new program has been responsible for re-establishing lost jobs, up to 4,000 in the first few months. Still more needs to be done to ensure that Haitians can benefit from these new economic opportunities.

Currently, Haitian factories are limited in what they can produce and export under the U.S. preference program to basic garments that have little “added” value. This causes investment in Haiti to be limited, given its inability to expand operations to produce more valuable goods that would entail more sophisticated operations, better training and, therefore, better paying jobs. Efforts are under way to build on current gains and expand them. In the global textile and apparel trade, it is likely that increased production in Haiti will draw part of the business currently undertaken by the Asian textile giants, e.g. China. USCCB will be supporting improvements to HHOPE that allow local Haitians to grow their businesses, create better paying jobs and work towards better labor standards in the still fragile economy.

## **ACTION REQUESTED:**

Let your members of Congress know that U.S. trade preference programs, such as the HHOPE Act, have had very real benefits for the people of Haiti and are helping to stabilize a country which had been the source of much regional instability and massive migrations. Encourage your Senators and Representative to build on their success and be supportive of improvements to HHOPE to allow Haitians to grow their businesses, create better paying jobs and work towards better labor standards in a still fragile economy. A stronger economy that reduces the level of poverty in Haiti is a moral obligation and a strategic necessity if Haiti is to continue on the road to stability.

## **RESOURCES:**

For copies of statements, visit: <http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/international/haiti.shtml>.

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