

Testimony of
Mr. Stephen Johnson

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Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to address Haiti's political and economic conditions. You are holding hearings today on a much more specific issue, that of U.S. immigration policies toward Haitians fleeing harsh conditions in their homeland to find a new life on U.S. shores. In my work as a regional analyst, I do not normally study immigration or refugee policy and therefore cannot provide expertise on those topics other than to express my belief that the solution to reducing migratory pressures is to help improve conditions in the country of origin. Moreover, Haiti is one of 35 countries that I research in Latin America. But it is a country that demands attention because of its proximity to the United States, because it has responsibilities as a member of the community of American states, and by virtue of the seemingly intractable problems of poor governance and deteriorating economic conditions that inspire out-migrations not just to the United States, but to other close neighbors as well. Given my research focus, I will try to provide an overview of the political and economic conditions in Haiti and an assessment of whether they are likely to improve over time.

Between Predation and Opportunism

Haiti is the oldest independent black republic in the world and the second oldest republic in the Americas after the United States. A French plantation society in western Hispaniola, it gained independence in 1804 after slaves overthrew the local government and defeated Napoleon's army. Despite this heroic beginning, Haitian leaders had few governing models to guide them beyond colonial rule. Haiti's first leader declared himself emperor and was killed by a mob on his way to put down a rebellion. Over the next 100 years, most other leaders were either deposed or killed, although one served out his full term of office.

Following an uprising in 1915, President Woodrow Wilson sent in U.S. Marines and the United States ran Haiti for 19 years. Extended U.S. control improved public health, expanded national infrastructure, and imposed fiscal discipline. But because local officials only served as figureheads, U.S.-imposed reforms failed to improve governance beyond training more professional security forces.

Even that disappeared when Francois Duvalier declared himself president-for-life in 1957. He replaced U.S.-trained troops with young followers less likely to challenge his authority and organized bands of rural vigilantes nicknamed the tonton macouts who soon surpassed the institutional army in strength. When "Papa Doc," as he was known, tried to obtain U.S. assistance to train them, the Kennedy Administration cut off aid.

Papa Doc's son Jean Claude succeeded him in 1971 at the age of 19. Uninterested in government, he left most of the administration to his mother. During the 1980s, hunger and diseases like AIDs spread while government officials looted the treasury. By 1986, mounting unrest spurred the Reagan Administration into asking the younger Duvalier to go into exile. Riots triggered a military coup and the army finally sent him packing. A series of interim governments followed and a new democratic constitution--still in force today--was approved in 1987.

In 1990, charismatic former Catholic priest Jean Bertrand-Aristide was elected president with 67 percent of the vote in what foreign observers judged to be a free and fair election. Barely eight months later, he too was overthrown by a military coup that resulted in another corrupt and repressive order. As a result some 41,000 Haitians left the island by sea, four times the number of rafters seeking asylum than in the previous 10 years.

Short-Lived Intervention and a Reversion to Old Patterns

On the heels of failed Organization of American States (OAS) and United Nations (UN) efforts to restore Haiti's elected government, the UN Security Council adopted a resolution empowering member states to use any means to restore Haiti's constitutional order. Acting with the best of intentions, the United States led a multinational military mission to Haiti in September 1994 to pressure the ruling generals to step aside. A month later, President Aristide was back in the presidency.

But, the U.S.-led Operation Restore Democracy was not the foreign policy slam-dunk many thought it would be. The Clinton Administration's objective was limited: to return Aristide to office, slow the exodus of Haitian rafters, and turn over peacekeeping duties to the United Nations by February 1996. Yet even as President Clinton praised Aristide's "commitment to reconciliation and the rule of law," the former priest betrayed that trust by surrounding himself with mobs and by harassing political opponents, some of whom reportedly turned up murdered. U.S. officials even had to persuade Aristide to step down at the end of his term to allow his hand-picked successor, René Préval take office.

Aid programs totaling some \$100 million from the United States followed to support a succession of new elections, build a new police force, revitalize the judiciary, and rebuild other neglected institutions. None of the money spent on elections--at \$6 million to \$8 million apiece--left behind any lasting electoral infrastructure. A professional police force of 6,000 trained by U.S. and Canadian instructors dwindled to about 3,000--most of whom are now loyalists to the president and do little to protect the public. After a new Coast Guard was set up to help apprehend drug traffickers, transshipments through the island actually increased from 10 to 14 percent according to a GAO study. In 2000, some 80 percent of those in prison were simply awaiting trial.

After Aristide left office, he heavily influenced his successor. Following flawed parliamentary elections in 1997, President Préval blocked a new vote until most assembly seats expired, leaving the government with just himself and a handful of unconfirmed cabinet officials in charge. When parliamentary elections were finally held in May 2000, authorities excluded nearly a quarter of the votes cast using a formula that violated two articles of Haiti's constitution. Aristide himself was returned to office in November in a questionable vote that the OAS observer mission boycotted and in which the estimated turnout was only 10 to 15 percent. Since then, Aristide's government has been locked in a tug-of-war with the opposition known as the Democratic Convergence over how to remedy the flawed May 2000 vote.

The dispute over the parliamentary elections prompted the Clinton Administration to suspend direct U.S. assistance to Haiti's government, a policy the Bush Administration has continued. The European community and multilateral institutions did likewise resulting in some \$500 million in aid being withheld until Aristide and the political opposition come to an agreement over the elections and when Haiti's government adopts minimal standards of accountability. But instead of implementing such reforms, President Aristide has engaged in a costly lobbying effort to restore foreign funding, calling conditioned assistance "economic terrorism."

Over the last two years, the OAS has tirelessly attempted to broker an agreement with both Aristide and the opposition, discussing formulas that ranged from removing a few senators in contested seats to holding entirely new elections. So far, intransigence on both sides has blocked success. Last month, in an effort to breath new life into the dialogue, the OAS adopted Resolution 822 recommending the resumption of direct aid to the government, if it would only account for it and make a concerted effort to protect human rights--dropping the requirement for a comprehensive electoral accord with the opposition. Most observers doubt if Aristide will accept even these more lenient conditions. On September 20, 2002, Aristide's minister in charge of electoral negotiations, Marc Bazin resigned, faulting the government on human rights and economic policy. And on September 29, Aristide's Justice Minister Jean Baptiste Brown stepped down complaining that he found himself "unable to substantively address serious issues such as professionalization of the Haitian police and fighting against impunity."

Eroded Economy

If Haiti's economy was pillaged by the Duvalier family, it has been battered by continuous political instability ever since. According to the World Bank, real per capita gross domestic product (GDP) declined about two percent per year during the 1980s. During the 1990s, it fell 2.5 percent per year. Part of the blame goes to the military coup in 1991 and embargoes on trade and financial transactions. But since Aristide's return, the continuing political crisis has blocked needed economic reforms. The World Bank's 1998 Poverty report put it more bluntly: "Haiti has

never had a tradition of governance aimed at providing services to the population or creating an environment conducive to sustainable growth."

From a practical standpoint, few outside investors would want to launch a business in a country where electricity is available for only a few hours a day. Few would want the headache of shepherding equipment and merchandise through a non-functioning customs bureaucracy. Fewer still are interested in conducting business where there is no rule of law and where partisan mobs can threaten employees or destroy assets. This, despite the fact that Haitian workers are known for their work ethic and entrepreneurial spirit.

Last year according to The Heritage Foundation's Index of Economic Freedom, Haiti, with nearly 8 million people, generated little more than a \$2.9 billion gross domestic product. That amounts to \$371 per capita, one of the lowest figures in the hemisphere. In 1999, it imported \$800 million worth of goods and services (half of it from the United States) while its exports only totaled \$359 million. Adult literacy is now estimated at 48 percent while unemployment stands at about 60 percent. Millions of adult Haitians eke out a living in subsistence agriculture in one of the most environmentally degraded places in the world, while only about 30,000 reportedly have jobs in manufacturing or assembly industries.

Aid to Haiti has generally failed to help. As noted above, the Aristide government is about as accountable for what it receives as the Duvalier regime before it. Although funds channeled solely to non-governmental organizations there have been effective in providing humanitarian relief and building infrastructure, they are at best "short-term solutions" that leave political institutions largely untouched according to the World Bank Country Assistance Evaluation dated February 2002. Last year, the United States provided \$77 million in such aid and this year \$55 million.

Big dollar projects by the United States and the World Bank in the absence of transparent governance have left no lasting footprint. As a result, the Clinton and Bush administrations, as well as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the Inter-American Development Bank have withheld some \$500 million in direct assistance since 2001. Although OAS Resolution 822 calls for unfreezing these accounts when Haiti fulfills new, less stringent requirements, much of that aid has already been redirected and may require new negotiations with donor organizations and countries.

In November 2000, U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan recommended curtailing the United Nations International Civilian Support Mission in Haiti (MICAH). In 2001, he stressed that any resumption of aid could not take place without a resolution to Haiti's political crisis. For its part, the European Union has terminated consultations intended to provide assistance through its Cotonou Agreement process linking African, Caribbean, and Pacific developing countries, finding that respect for democratic principles in Haiti has not been restored.

Human Rights Woes

Reports by Human Rights Watch and the U.S. Department of State charge that the governing Fanmi Lavalas party has promoted a climate of violence and polarization. Aristide supporters and leaders of allied popular organizations have repeatedly threatened dissidents with violent attacks and driven opponents into exile. Instead of healing divisions, Aristide seems to create and exploit them like autocrats before him although the mobs that support him may, in fact, be beyond his control.

As an example, on May 21, 2001 a pro-government mob surrounded a house where the

opposition Democratic Convergence was meeting in Les Cayes. They threw rocks and fired weapons. Nearby police took more than an hour to respond. And when they came, they arrested the Convergence leader Gabriel Fortune inside. The government supposedly established the Haitian National Police (HNP) in 1995 as the sole institutional security force in the country after disbanding the military. But in his second term of office, President Aristide politicized it by filling key positions with Lavalas party loyalists.

Moreover, Aristide has turned to mob rule to solve the problem of rising crime. His "zero tolerance" crime policy announced in June 2001 made it unnecessary to bring criminals to court if citizens or police caught them in the act. According to Human Rights Watch in its 2002 World Report, "his words were widely interpreted by Haitians as an invitation to vigilante justice and police violence. Human rights groups reported that in the months following the speech, dozens of suspected thieves were killed by mobs."

Sadly, "zero tolerance" has claimed the lives of others as well. Last December, Brignol Lindor, news director of Radio Echo 2000 in Petit-Goâve, was hacked to death by a partisan mob. A few days before, the town's deputy mayor Duby Bony reportedly called for "zero tolerance" to be enforced against a list of members of the political opposition that included Lindor. An inquiry carried out by the Association of Haitian Journalists found that members from the popular organization, "Domi Nan Bois," close to Lavalas, admitted committing the murder. According to the French-based Reporters Without Frontiers, 40 journalists were attacked or threatened and a dozen forced into exile in 2001 alone.

Outlook

In summary, the politics of winner-take-all, mob rule, and the exercise of power from the top down have hobbled Haiti's progress since independence and will probably continue to do so for some time in the future. Hope exists among Haitians who understand the give and take of democracy and among the working poor whose diligence and entrepreneurial talents help them succeed outside of Haiti. But promoting a level playing field to enable their influence to flower will not be easy and it could take decades to accomplish if the experience of the American occupation can be considered as an example. Blind aid to the regime will not solve any problems, as previous experience has shown it to be wasted. Assistance through NGOs buys time, but leaves no lasting solution. Perhaps only sustained commitments on the part of the international community will help establish the necessary security umbrella and a check on authoritarian impulses so that the practices of compromise and consensus can take hold. In the interim, disaffected leaders from the current government, dissidents, and the unemployed poor will continue to migrate to the United States, the Dominican Republic, Cuba, and the Bahamas, wherever they think their chances of survival and earning a living are better. But they will be competing with hundreds of thousands of migrants from the conflict in Colombia, civil unrest in Venezuela, economic meltdown in Argentina, and other states in the Americas with troubled economies or simmering disaffection. Helping all of these societies remedy these problems and dealing fairly with migrants and refugees from them will be a daunting task.