

Unrest and clashes in Haiti. Caritas workers: "Fears of an authoritarian drift"

Is Haiti backsliding into dictatorship or authoritarian rule? After the protests staged by the opposition forces last Sunday, February 14, in the capital Port-au-Prince, with violent clashes between protesters and the police that left one person dead, several injured and 23 people arrested, fears are mounting amidst the population of the Caribbean island. President Jovenel Moïse has no intention of stepping down, claiming that his five-year term will expire in February 2022 as he took office one year after his appointment. According to his opponents, however, his mandate ends this year pursuant to the Constitution. **A deep-rooted, complex political crisis:** Moïse has been ruling for a year by decree because there is no parliament. National elections scheduled for 2018 have been postponed indefinitely and the Haitian people, burdened by poverty and disease, are increasingly worried about their future: 60% live below the poverty line, there is rampant inflation, food and fuel shortages, and COVID-19 has claimed over 2,500 lives. **Haitian citizens have been calling for President Jovenel Moïse's resignation** for the past two years, in the wake of scandals and corruption. In a statement released a week ago the Haitian Bishops' Conference expressed criticism of the president's decisions, regretting the current difficulties: "The country is on the verge of explosion; the daily life of the people is death, assassinations, impunity, insecurity. Discontent is everywhere, in almost everyone's domains." There is also an open clash between President Moïse and Haiti's judiciary branch. The president ordered the arrest of Supreme Court judge Joseph Mécène Jean-Louis, whom the opposition had named as their chosen interim president, on charges of staging a coup d'état. He then ordered the forced retirement of three other Court judges.



[, a Caritas Italy worker in Haiti for the past two years, told SIR from Port-au-Prince. "There have been clashes in many parts of the country, perpetrated by armed gangs that run the streets of the capital, spreading violence and fear. The United States and the Organisation of American States \(OAS\), Moïse's supporters, are backing his proposal to hold new elections by the end of the year. However, observers are concerned because of the grave instability in the country with risks of further violence and clashes. In the meantime, "schools remain closed", said the Caritas worker, "human rights are being violated and the political turmoil exacerbates widespread instability. Furthermore, for the past year people have been living in fear of kidnapping for ransom, a strategy to fuel fear. The poor living in the slums are also being kidnapped, not only the wealthy: "The people are exasperated and they are afraid of going out of their homes."](#)



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[. Caritas Italy worker in Port-au-Prince. "There's a lot of fear and anxiety. It's a worrying state of anarchy. The general feeling is one of confusion: what will happen next?" Caritas Italy has been actively operating in Haiti since 2010, the year of the devastating earthquake that killed over 230,000 people. Since then, it has financed a total of 221 solidarity projects, worth over €24 million. The projects include support to local Caritas, education to citizenship, income support and food security for disadvantaged communities and small farmers, to encourage empowerment processes.](#)



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