



Statement on February 7, 2024

Today is an important day in Haiti. It marks the end of the Duvalier dictatorship in 1986 and later became the day that Haiti's presidents hand over power to an elected successor. On this February 7, however, Haiti has no president nor any elected national officials. On this February 7, the unelected de facto prime minister, Ariel Henry, holds all the power.

Haiti is mired in chaos, with criminal gangs in control of 80% of the capital, an 83% increase in kidnappings for ransom over last year, and widespread food insecurity, according to the UN special envoy to Haiti. While negotiations between Henry and opposition groups have made little progress since he assumed power after the assassination of Jovenel Moïse more than two and a half years ago, the Biden Administration has continued to provide Henry with political support, giving him no incentive to step down.

Recent polls show that Henry is unpopular with the Haitian people, who did not vote for him to be prime minister. His lack of legitimacy is a major reason for the power vacuum and the violence that goes with it. [There is also evidence linking Henry to Haiti's gangs.](#)

The large number of small arms and ammunition that have saturated Haitian society turn a power vacuum into a crisis. The vast majority of weapons and the ammunition are coming from the United States, and without them, the gangs and their political supporters would lose their power. A [March 2023 UN report](#) identified five U.S. states with lax gun laws as the primary sources of illegal arms trafficking to Haiti. Criminal actors purchase the weapons in the United States and smuggle them into Haiti. Some weapons also make it into Haiti legally, by means of Haiti's corrupt government and the U.S. Commerce Department's lax granting of export licenses.

We urge Congress and the White House to support the following actions to restore order and democracy in Haiti:

- Call on Ariel Henry to step down and end U.S. political support for his regime;
- Support a Haitian-led transitional process that prepares the country for free and fair elections;
- Put an end to the flow of weapons into Haiti. Support the [ARMAS ACT](#) in the House, which will address concerns about the Commerce Department's process for granting export licenses, and introduce similar legislation in the Senate;
- Work together to address flaws in U.S. gun laws that permit the illegal flow of weapons to Haiti;
- Invest in free and fair elections, anti-corruption measures, and criminal justice reform in Haiti.

Quixote Center
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
Religious of Jesus and Mary
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas Justice Team