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Haiti: Arms proliferation fuels human rights abuses ahead of elections

Around 170,000 small arms are being used by former military personnel and criminal gangs to commit grave human rights abuses as the country prepares for elections, Amnesty International said in a new report issued today.

Amnesty International called on the interim government and the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) to implement without delay a comprehensive disarmament, demobilization and reintegration program.

"Small arms are being used by illegal armed groups and former military to kidnap, sexually abuse and kill Haitians with absolute impunity. Without disarmament and effective justice for the victims, Haiti will sink further into crisis," said Amnesty International.

The report "Haiti: Disarmament delayed, justice denied", shows how in several parts of the country, where state authority remains frail, armed groups and individuals continue to illegally control territory and population and commit criminal acts without being challenged by national authorities, including the National Police, or by MINUSTAH officials.

Attempts to disarm illegal armed groups have been insufficient, showing the Haitian authorities' unwillingness to implement an effective disarmament plan.

In March 2005, 325 former military personnel symbolically turned in 7 weapons in Cap-Haitien, marking their return to civilian life. Since then, no serious attempts have been made to disarm the former military and rebel groups.

The lack of political will from the interim government to put in place urgently needed reforms of the National Haitian Police (HNP) or to implement a disarmament program is hampering the efforts of MINUSTAH to solve the crisis.

"Lack of accountability of HNP officers and widespread impunity for human rights abuses by armed groups cannot lead to durable peace in Haiti. The interim government is failing in its international and fundamental responsibilities to protect Haitians and their most basic rights."

Amid increased violence and insecurity, MINUSTAH should take more decisive actions to fulfil its objectives of protecting civilians, promoting human rights and fighting impunity.

“Durable peace in Haiti will never be achieved unless those responsible for human rights crimes are held to account and the victims obtain redress.”

Amnesty International is calling on the Haitian interim government to:

- Implement without delay a comprehensive disarmament, demobilization and reintegration program.
- Investigate all reports of human rights violations and bring those responsible to justice.
- Provide reparation for victims of human rights violations.
- Reform the judicial system in accordance with international human rights legislation and end illegal arrests and long-term detentions for those awaiting trial.

In addition, Amnesty International is calling on the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti to:

- Work together with the interim government for the establishment of a disarmament, demobilization and reintegration program and the investigation of human rights abuses.
- Issue frequent, public reports on the human rights situation.
- Vet police officers for human rights abuses and train all HNP personnel on human rights standards and international standards for law enforcement officials.

For a full copy of the report: “Haiti: Disarmament delayed, Justice denied” and AI’s recommendations to Haiti’s interim government, MINUSTAH and the international community, please see: <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/AMR360052005>

Public Document

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