

URGENT ACTION

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER IN DANGER

Milostène Castin is a defender of the rights of subsistence farmers who have suffered land seizures, displacement, corruption and violent attacks in north-eastern Haiti. Due to his activism, Mr. Castin has been attacked and intimidated numerous times. In late 2020, armed men repeatedly fired gunshots and smashed the windows of his home. An unidentified man also attempted to repeatedly pick up one of his children from school in what Mr. Castin believes was a kidnapping attempt. On 12 May 2021 Mr. Castin received a death threat. We demand the authorities protect him, according to his wishes.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Jovenel Moïse
President of the Republic of Haiti
1, Rue de la République
Palais National
Port-au-Prince, Haiti.
Email: nahomme.dorvil@presidence.ht

Dear Mr. President,

I write to you to raise my concern about the safety of Mr. Milostene Castin, a human rights defender and coordinator of AREDE (Action pour la Reforestation et la Défense de l'Environnement), an organization based in Trou-du-Nord, that defends the rights of subsistence and small-scale farmers from land seizures, forced displacement and violent attacks.

For nearly a decade, Mr. Castin has been the subject of repeated attacks and intimidation, which he believes are due to his activism. Such attacks intensified in the last two months of 2020, when a group of armed men repeatedly went to his house and fired gunshots. They smashed the windows on two occasions, once causing injury to one of his children. An unidentified man also went to the school of one of his children, in an apparent kidnapping or intimidation attempt. As a result, Mr. Castin and his family have been forced to leave their home, fearing for their safety.

Despite reporting the attacks to the authorities, Mr. Castin has received no protection and the attacks continued. Most recently on 12 May of 2021, Mr. Castin was told that government officials "want him dead" in reaction to his defence of farmers in a community facing expropriation.

I therefore demand that your government, along with the National Police of Haiti, fulfil their obligation to protect Mr. Castin in accordance to his wishes so that he may feel safe and return to his home and legitimate activities as a human rights defender. I also demand an immediate and independent investigation to find and prosecute those responsible for the recent acts of intimidation against him and his family. I remind the Haitian authorities of your duty to guarantee that human rights defenders can carry out their work without fear of reprisals, as established in the 1998 UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Milostene Castin is an activist who coordinates the organization Action to Reforest and Defend the Environment (Action pour la Reforestation et la Défense de l'Environnement, AREDE) in Trou-du-Nord, a town in north-east Haiti. Since 2013, the organization has been involved in campaigning against land seizures, intimidation and forced displacement of subsistence farmers by armed groups suspected to be connected with business interests and the government. For this he has suffered attempts by armed gangs to beat or kill him on numerous occasions, including a stabbing at the hands of armed men during a peaceful protest in 2019, a year in which violent repression of protests against corruption and impunity took place across the country.

In 2020, as more subsistence farmers faced expropriations, threats, and violence, Mr. Castin supported their demands with documentation and advocacy, and organized peaceful protests. On 10 October, after one such protest, six men stood outside Mr. Castin's home for several hours and began shooting around the house and smashed a window while he and his family were inside. Later in October, on three separate occasions a man went to the school of one of Mr. Castin's children and asked the school staff for his child by name in an apparent kidnapping or intimidation attempt. The child had to be pulled out of school for their safety.

During the last two months of 2020, armed men went to Mr. Castin's house regularly at night and shot their weapons nearby. This also happened on 31 December, when the men, in addition to firing gunshots in front of the house, also threw rocks and bottles smashing all the windows and injuring another of Mr. Castin's children. He called the police, but no one came to the house to protect the family and arrest the attackers.

Since then, Mr. Castin and his family had to leave their home and their children are unable to attend school for their safety. After leaving, armed men continued to come to his house for some time looking for him.

On 12 May of 2021, Mr. Castin was told by an affiliate of the ruling party that government officials "want him dead" because of his defence of farmers in a community facing expropriation. Based on information he has received from trusted contacts, Mr. Castin believes these attacks are motivated by his activism in favour of dispossessed subsistence farmers and that the attackers are linked to government and business actors.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: French. You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 23 July 2021

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Milostene Castin (He, him, his)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: n/a