

Amnesty International

Haiti: All armed groups must be disarmed

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The proliferation of arms across Haiti is widespread. Despite the presence of the US lead Multinational Interim Force, brought into Haiti to help address the upsurge in violence since February 2004, virtually none of the numerous irregular armed groups have handed in their weapons. These armed groups include gangs which support former President Aristide (also known as '*chimères*'), armed gangs affiliated with other political organizations, former rebels, members of the disbanded Haitian Armed Forces, other groups which control territory and non-political armed gangs.

There is a climate of insecurity and fear among the civilian population from the many armed groups currently at large. Several known human rights abusers are now part of these groups and AI has received reports of new human rights violations committed by these groups including killings and ill-treatment. Neither the MIF nor the interim government has yet established control over substantial parts of the country.

Although the Haitian interim government has been in office since the beginning of March, it has not taken effective action towards disarmament. Nor has it produced longer term plans to assess the social and economic aspects of disarmament which will help to address Haiti's longstanding and widespread poverty. A UN Security Council Resolution authorized the Multinational Interim Force 'to take all the necessary measures' in order 'to contribute to a secure and stable environment'. Nevertheless, the Multinational Interim Force has not taken substantive steps towards fulfilling its commitment to disarmament.

A nationwide, effective disarmament program is urgently needed in Haiti. The international presence in Haiti must work closely with the Haitian National Police and ensure that immediate, effective and thorough disarmament actions are taken to create security for the Haitian population, to re-establish and safeguard the rule of law and to break the cycles of violence and impunity.

Take Action!

Please send letters as soon as possible English, French or Spanish to your own Ministry of Foreign Affairs raising AI's concerns.

Sample letter:

Dear [Secretary Powell/ Mr Barnier/ Honourable Bill Graham],

Despite the presence of Multinational Interim Force, I am still very concerned about the safety of the Haitian people given that none of the irregular armed groups have handed in their weapons.

I welcome the fact that, supported by the Multinational Interim Force, the interim government has achieved some success in stabilizing the situation in Haiti. However, so far it has failed to comprehensively act to safeguard stability and security in the longer term, most notably by not achieving disarmament of armed groups. The interim government needs to show its commitment to a stable and secure future for Haiti by making disarmament and reintegration into society of former members of armed groups a priority.

As [Secretary of State/ Minister of Foreign Affairs] of a country whose troops form part of the Multinational Interim Force, I urge you to consider the following recommendations as crucial towards establishing the rule of law and a long-term secure environment that enables respect for human rights, including the well-being of civilians:

- Take immediate, effective and thorough actions to disarm all unofficial armed groups across Haiti, including pro-Aristide militias, armed gangs affiliated with other political organizations, rebel forces and non-political armed gangs.

- Follow disarmament with immediate, effective and thorough steps to disband all unofficial armed groups, recovering the full range of weapons, whether they are arms which were kept by the former military or newly-acquired weapons, linked to drug or cross-border arms trafficking.

- Ensure that all human rights abuses perpetrated by the irregular armed groups are thoroughly investigated and that all human rights violators amongst irregular armed groups are brought to justice.

Your public commitment to these recommendations will be an important step towards safeguarding the Haitian population.

Yours sincerely,

The Honorable Colin Powell

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