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As predicted, January’s second Monday came, and the inevitable in Haiti’s deep political crisis happened: Parliament was dissolved (NotiCen, Jan. 8, 2015).

In an atmosphere of uncertainty, Haitian President Michel Martelly, who was thus left to rule by decree, has since sworn in a new Cabinet, including a prime minister who automatically took office in the absence of legislators to usher him in.

The time limit came on the fifth anniversary of the magnitude 7.0 earthquake that in 2010 devastated Haiti’s capital and other areas, killing more than 200,000, displacing another 600,000, leaving 1.5 million homeless—many still in that appalling situation (NotiCen, Jan. 21, 2010, and Oct. 20, 2011)

Opposition leaders immediately criticized the makeup of the new Cabinet, saying it did not turn out to be the consensus government the president had promised to put together.

Meanwhile, demonstrators took to the streets, protesting against the appointments and demanding Martelly’s resignation.

The parliamentary breakdown was the result of a stalemate between Martelly and a bloc of opposition lawmakers on calling, before Jan. 12, for the much-delayed election of senators, deputies, and mayors—overdue since 2011—and the absence of an agreement to extend legislators’ terms beyond Jan. 12 to prevent the crisis. The day before the deadline, Martelly—a popular singer known as "Sweet Micky"—said consensus had been reached with opposition members, but the agreement eventually fell through.

Calls for continued international cooperation

Hours after Parliament was dissolved, the UN Core Group of countries closely cooperating with Haiti—Brazil, Canada, the US, members of the European Union (EU)—deplored the unfolding of Haitian events. In a statement, the group also expressed its confidence "that the executive and all the political actors will take action with responsibility and restraint."

The group also expressed both its commitment to cooperate with "whatever legitimate Haitian government institutions remain" and its regret at what it described as the opposition’s lack of will to reach an agreement with Martelly even though, among other concessions, the president obtained former prime minister Laurent Lamothe’s resignation—replacing him with Evans Paul.

A week later, speaking at the UN Security Council, Haitian Foreign Minister Duly Brutus called on the international community to maintain its support for that country. "We’d like the Security Council, as well as all of our partners in the international community, to continue to back the government and people of Haiti as they move toward shoring up the rule of law and democracy," the official said, assuring that the French-speaking Caribbean island nation "has overcome successfully the crisis."
Paul, a former Port-au-Prince mayor and a 2006 presidential candidate, took office on Jan. 14 as Haiti’s new prime minister.

In 48 hours, thousands of demonstrators took to the streets in Port-au-Prince, the Haitian capital, demanding Martelly’s resignation. The president’s adversaries accuse him of manipulating the political crisis that led to parliamentary collapse so he can rule by decree, while the government says the opposition refused to pass new election legislation that would include creating a commission in charge of overseeing the vote.

As in many other such demonstrations that took place last year, riot police broke up the march whose destination was the site of the National Palace, Haiti’s seat of government crushed by the 2010 earthquake.

Once the police dispersed the angry crowd, Martelly, standing on what had been the grounds of the National Palace, said that a consensus government would be announced within the following two days and a few days later a new election authority would be set up to organize the postponed elections.

Martelly also committed to promoting a transparent vote, saying, "I reaffirm my commitment to make every effort for the realization of honest, credible, and participatory elections."

Four days after Paul took office, in a post in his Facebook account, Martelly unveiled the makeup of the new Cabinet, including several ministers already serving with him—the heads of such Ministries as Defense, Foreign Affairs, Health, and Tourism—and allies joining as newcomers.

**Concern about makeup of new Cabinet**

On Jan. 19, the head of state swore in his new team, and criticism immediately broke out. Ministers whose appointment has been questioned include Minister of Planning Yves-Germain Joseph, a former senior official close to late dictator Jean-Claude "Bébé Doc" Duvalier (1971-1986), who died last year, the son of the also ruthless and corrupt dictator François "Papa Doc" Duvalier (1957-1971, president for life since 1964).

Also criticized was Public Security Minister Carel Alexandre, a former presidential security chief dismissed in 2012 under pressure from the human rights community.

In former Senate president Simon Desras’ opinion, in the new Cabinet "there isn’t a true opening, as was promised," which means that "this isn’t solving the crisis, and, what’s worse, it’s causing more problems." As an example, Desras underlined that Alexandre’s appointment is "particularly worrying."

During the swearing-in ceremony, Martelly pointed out that "the government we install today is the fruit of dialogue with the sons and daughters of the country."

On Jan. 28, addressing the two-day Third Summit of the Comunidad de Estados Latinoamericanos y Caribeños (CELAC), held in the town of Belén, some 11 km west of San José, the capital of Costa Rica, Martelly said, "Today, Haiti stays the course of elections, viewing, in the near future, the establishment of a new legislature. As for myself, I must hand over power to a newly elected president in 2016."