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## **Change of Guard in Haiti: An Unpopular U.N. Mission Makes Way for a Replacement**

by *George Rodríguez*

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The UN's security force, the Blue Helmets, is about to end a mission in Haiti that, over more than a decade, has earned official praise as well as popular rejection.

The 2,370-strong Mission des Nations Unies pour la Stabilisation en Haïti (United Nations Mission for the Stabilization of Haiti, MINUSTAH) will close operation by Oct. 15, as ordered by the UN Security Council on April 13. It will be replaced by a smaller police mission whose initial six-month mandate could be extended for as long as two years. One of its tasks is to allow Haiti to enhance its own force, the Police Nationale d'Haïti (Haiti National Police, PNH).

### *A better outlook*

The Security Council decided to remove MINUSTAH after considering Haiti's recent steps toward stabilization: The country held its much-delayed presidential elections, a new president was sworn-in and was able to form a government, and the country's legislature became functional again ([NotiCen, March 9, 2017](#)).

"We strongly support the ending of this mission, turning it into something else," Matthew Rycroft, the British ambassador to the UN, told reporters minutes before the April 13 Security Council meeting. "What we now need is a newly configured mission, which is focused on the rule of law and human rights in Haiti."

Rycroft's take on MINUSTAH fully coincided with the report that UN Secretary-General António Guterres had delivered during a Security Council session on March 16. In the 37-page document, Guterres noted that "the success of the elections and the smooth transition of power to a new president bear testimony to the increased maturity and capacity of the Haitian institutions ... to address differences through dialogue and legal channels."

Guterres asked that the mission's military component undergo a staggered withdrawal and that its civilian tasks be reduced. He recommended that as MINUSTAH closed down, a successor peacekeeping mission, with a new name, be developed to work with the UN country team on issues relating to the rule of law and police development. The council adopted his suggestions a month later.

In the secretary-general's view, the new mission's headquarters would be located in the capital, Port-au-Prince, with mobile teams to be deployed to other parts of the country, as needed.

Only two days before it decided on MINUSTAH, the Security Council heard another report on the mission from Sandra Honoré, the secretary-general's special representative for Haiti.

Honoré, who was appointed by Guterres' immediate predecessor, Ban Ki-moon, told the Security Council that Haiti's political outlook had "significantly improved, with the opening of a crucial window of opportunity to address the root causes of the political crisis that preceded the polls."

In Honoré's view, "Haiti's return to constitutional order and the full functioning of the executive, the legislature, and local government has now set the stage to address the many pressing challenges facing the country." Honoré said that "a relatively stable security situation" prevailed in Haiti, "despite continuous signs of fragility."

She told the Security Council that the PNH, a 14,000-member force, had shown "increased capacity in the planning and execution of complex operations," such as keeping the peace during the presidential elections, as well as the more routine tasks of fighting crime and maintaining public order.

But Honoré pointed out that the PNH still needed strengthening, which in turn required the UN's support.

"Further development of the national police, including in the areas of internal management and oversight, the police-to-population ratio, and the geographic coverage will have to occur within the framework of the new five-year strategic development plan [2017-2021] to ensure the sustainability of the law enforcement body," she said.

Also in support of MINUSTAH, Nikki Haley, the new US ambassador to the UN, said during the meeting that "peacekeeping has made a great contribution to Haiti," and that "its support of the government has been essential in ensuring a secure and stable environment."

But while UN members praised the mission's work, in the streets in Port-au-Prince hundreds of demonstrators have demanded MINUSTAH's immediate withdrawal, as well as reparation for the victims of the cholera epidemic triggered by MINUSTAH troops ([NotiCen, Nov. 10, 2016](#)). The epidemic was unleashed in October 2010 after cholera-infected Nepalese troopers polluted Haiti's largest river, the Artibonite. The epidemic has killed 10,000 people and sickened about one million.

"The Haitian state must take a clear position on the cholera question and not renew MINUSTAH's mandate," read a large, rectangular banner carried by participants in a protest held on March 29 to mark the 30th anniversary of Haiti's Constitution.

Leaders of the march met with legislators Peter Constantin, Joseph Manés Louis, and Roger Millien, all members of a congressional investigative commission on MINUSTAH's activities.

During a joint press conference held immediately after the meeting, Constantin told journalists, "The United Nations, which postures itself as the people's champion around the world, has done terrible things in this country, and should compensate people whom they've hurt."

He said the Blue Helmets had "committed unspeakable crimes," and insisted that reparations were necessary "so that justice can be done." Besides being held responsible for the cholera epidemic, the mission's troops have been repeatedly accused of sexual abuse, including rape, transactional sex, and kidnapping.

## *No accountability*

In a January report on the preliminary investigation on sexual exploitation and abuse at the hands of the UN's mission in Haiti, Mark Snyder wrote that the abuse had been "substantial and has been grossly under reported."

“Further, in-depth investigation into these abuses is vital and urgent,” he wrote, adding that close to 600 victims might be identified who would agree to in-person interviews.

“This number in itself indicates a victim count that requires immediate attention and significant modifications to current MINUSTAH peacekeeping operations,” he wrote. “The preliminary results of our investigation show that actions taken ... do not appear to have been adequate in preventing further SEA [sexual exploitation and abuse] perpetrated by MINUSTAH personnel.”

In Snyder’s view, “the creation of the CDU [UN’s Conduct and Discipline Unit] and the extensive efforts with the three pillars of prevention of misconduct, enforcement of UN standards of conduct, and remedial action,” have not broken “a persistent cycle of exploitation and abuse.”

Snyder also wrote that “perpetrators are often militarily armed individuals in significant positions of power in the middle of an extremely vulnerable population ... and are untouchable by the Haitian system of justice or other traditional methods of recourse or of possible support.”

He explained that troop-contributing countries are responsible for investigating and prosecuting faults committed by military personnel, adding that “this reality leaves victims with very few options to seek justice.”

Additionally, most cases of MINUSTAH SEA remain unaccounted for by the UN, Snyder wrote.

“Of the many contributing factors present that will continue to allow, if not encourage, UN SEA, is the devaluation of Haitian victims based on gender, race, and impoverishment, as well as the male entitlement and the social value orientation of the peacekeepers,” he added.

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