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## **New U.N. Mission in Haiti Inherits Predecessor's Negative Record**

*by George Rodríguez*

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A new UN mission is beginning its work in Haiti, picking up the pieces after its predecessor's heavily negative record and with the local population skeptical of what they regard as a mere label change.

After almost 14 years of what many people and human rights organizations consider a military occupation of Haiti, the Mission des Nations Unies pour la Stabilisation en Haïti (UN Mission for Stabilization in Haiti, MINUSTAH) left the country on October 15 ([NotiCen, Aug. 9, 2007](#), [Oct. 3, 2013](#), [June 22, 2017](#)).

Its successor, the Mission des Nations Unies pour l'Appui à la Justice en Haïti (UN Mission for Justice Support in Haiti, MINUJUSTH), immediately stepped in ([NotiCen, May 11, 2017](#)).

According to the official view, MINUJUSTH follows up on MINUSTAH's excellent job in stabilizing the country, having upheld human rights and paved the way for a repeatedly delayed but ultimately completed election process.

But Haitians in general and human rights advocates in particular point to the part of MINUSTAH's record that includes reports of UN troopers' sexual abuse of women and children, military anti-crime operations resulting in the killings of unarmed civilians, and thousands of deaths from an ongoing cholera epidemic that was triggered by soldiers of the UN group ([NotiCen, March 28, 2013](#), and [Nov. 10, 2016](#)). They see no reason to believe the new mission will be any better than its predecessor.

MINUSTAH was created by the UN's Resolution 1542, adopted in April 2004. It was expected, among other things, to support the government and human rights institutions as well as NGOs "in their efforts to promote and protect human rights, particularly of women and children, in order to ensure individual accountability for human rights abuses and redress for victims," according to the resolution.

But as personal accounts and reports from various sources revealed, during MINUSTAH's 2004-2017 stay, its peacekeepers, known as Blue Helmets, at times victimized the population they were tasked with protecting.

Cholera infected UN troopers polluted the country's largest river, the Artibonite, by throwing contaminated sewage from one of their bases into the water, thus triggering an ongoing Cholera epidemic that has so far sickened around one million people and claimed as many as 10,000 lives.

MINUSTAH troopers are also blamed for the killing of unarmed civilians in anti-crime operations carried out in places such as Cité Soleil, a seaside shantytown in of Port-au-Prince, Haiti's capital. According to press reports, in just one action in July 2005, the Blue Helmets fired close to 23,000 bullets plus five mortars, and threw almost 80 grenades.

## *AP reports abuse of women*

Haitian women and children have been a particularly vulnerable. An investigation by the Associated Press (AP) released earlier this year revealed over 200 allegations of sexual abuse of women and minors—both girls and boys—by UN troopers, as well as a child sex ring run by more than 100 members of the MINUSTAH military.

“Here in Haiti, at least 134 Sri Lankan peacekeepers exploited nine children in a sex ring from 2004 to 2007, according to an internal UN report obtained by the AP,” the news agency reported. “In the wake of the report, 114 peacekeepers were sent home. None was ever imprisoned.”

The AP reported a case in which a teenage boy said he was gang-raped in 2011 by Uruguayan Blue Helmets who filmed the alleged assault on a cellphone. Images involving four peacekeepers and their commanding officers “went viral on the internet,” according to AP.

“The men never faced trial in Haiti; four of the five were convicted in Uruguay of ‘private violence,’ a lesser charge,” the AP added. “Uruguayan officials said at the time that it was a prank gone wrong and that no rape occurred.”

The AP also reported that dozens of Haitian women had said they were raped, “and dozens more had what is euphemistically called ‘survival sex,’” as a means to alleviate poverty.

Referring to a group of nine other victims who were abused by soldiers from Sri Lanka, the AP pointed out that “the sexual acts described ... are simply too many to be presented exhaustively in this report, especially since each claimed multiple sexual partners at various locations where the Sri Lankan contingents were deployed throughout Haiti over several years.”

## *‘More harm than good’*

Some Haitians, the AP said, “wonder whether the UN has done more harm than good in a country that has endured tragedy after tragedy since it became the first black republic in 1804.”

In this regard, AP also quoted US Senator Bob Corker, the Tennessee Republican who heads of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, as telling the news agency, “If I heard that a UN peacekeeping mission was coming near my home in Chattanooga, I’d be on the first plane out of here to go back and protect my family.”

Nevertheless, referring to the MINUSTAH pullout and its replacement by MINUJUSTH, Nikki Haley, the US ambassador to the UN, said, “Peacekeeping has made a great contribution to Haiti,” adding that it had ensured a secure and stable environment.

“We regard the transformation of the Haiti mission ... as a strong example for how peacekeeping missions can and should change as a country’s political situation changes,” she said.

MINUJUSTH was created in April by the UN Security Council’s Resolution 2350, as a “follow-on peacekeeping mission.” It is to be operative for an initial, renewable six-month period, until April 15, 2018, with the mandate “to assist the government of Haiti to strengthen rule-of-law institutions in Haiti,” support and develop the national police, and “engage in human rights monitoring, reporting, and analysis.”

According to the resolution, “MINUJUSTH will be headed by a special representative of the secretary general, who will also play a good offices and advocacy role at the political level to ensure full implementation of the mandate.”

Given MINUSTAH’s record, locals are meeting the arrival of MINUJUSTH’s with skepticism.

On Oct. 19, just days after the change, Haitian-American writer Edwidge Danticat clearly expressed those misgivings in an article in The New Yorker magazine titled “A New Chapter for the Disastrous United Nations Mission in Haiti?”

Danticat, the author of novels and short stories focused on Haitian identity and the diaspora, noted that “MINUSTAH was a continuous [military operation](#) in a country in which there was no war.”

She added that rapes by MINUSTAH Blue Helmets remain underreported, and that “those who have come forward have had to confront the same type of repudiation faced by the initial cholera victims. Their rapists were rarely punished. They were simply sent home.” Meanwhile, she added, “unacknowledged ‘MINUSTAH babies’ and their destitute mothers are treated as though they do not exist.”

She calls [MINUJUSTH](#) “a rebranding effort, an attempt by the UN to give itself a clean slate and erase MINUSTAH’s past.”

If the UN were serious about its stated goals, she added, it would have MINUJUSTH investigate the damage done by MINUSTAH. “Or, better yet, [the UN should] assign an independent body to do so, then offer the warranted compensation for the extrajudicial and civilian killings, the sexual assaults, and the introduction of cholera,” she proposed.

“Why should Haitians trust another group of UN ‘peacekeepers’ who claim to promote the same human rights, justice, and rule of law that have been so blatantly violated by their colleagues?” she wrote. “The UN may want to leave MINUSTAH’s dark chapter behind, but Haitians will have to suffer the consequences of the group’s actions for generations to come. And no new mission, under whatever acronym, will change that.”

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