



Undoing Haiti's Deadly Gang Alliance

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Principal Findings

What's new? A united front of Haiti's most powerful gangs, Viv Ansanm, has extended its territorial reach, expanded its illicit rackets and pushed the country to a fresh peak of violence. As a new international force readies for deployment, gangs increasingly claim they are fighting to defend the poorest from predatory elites.

Why does it matter? With Haiti's transitional government due to wind down in February 2026, gangs are intent on using their clout to place allies in the administration and gain a wide-ranging amnesty. Blessed by the UN, the new Gang Suppression Force could spur a surge in combat, possibly endangering civilian lives.

What should be done? Outside partners should provide the new force with the resources needed to regain territorial control and bring citizens respite. Once the balance of power shifts toward the state, officials should engage the gangs in talks about curbing violence, demobilising the illicit groups, and severing links between crime and Haitian elites.

Executive Summary

Born of Port-au-Prince's most powerful gangs, Viv Ansanm has raised the criminal threat overhanging Haiti's state and civilians to alarming heights. The gang coalition announced itself to the world by besieging the Haitian capital in early 2024, triggering former Prime Minister Ariel Henry's resignation. After consolidating its hold on much of the city, Viv Ansanm has expanded into neighbouring departments, tightened its grip on the main roads connecting Port-au-Prince to the rest of the country and mounted attacks on the airport, essentially cutting Haiti off. Gangs' violent offensives have killed over 16,000 people since 2022. But a rising death toll and diversifying criminal portfolio, now including extortion, piracy and drug trafficking, have not stopped gangs from claiming to represent the country's downtrodden, especially on social media. UN approval of a new foreign force to combat the gangs could shift the balance of power. But it is vital that plans are in place not just to overpower the gangs but also to persuade them to demobilise.

Haitian business and political elites have relied on paramilitary forces to protect their interests since the 1950s dictatorship of Francois Duvalier, or "Papa Doc". But in the wake of the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse in July 2021, gangs have mutated, evolving from tools in the hands of the most powerful to overlords of Haiti. Two main gang groupings – the G-9, whose most public figure was Jimmy Chérizier, alias Barbecue, and the Gpèp, under Gabriel Jean Pierre, known as "Ti Gabriel" – fought for supremacy after Moïse's murder. Even as the two faced off, gang leaders discussed whether to strike agreements to scale down the death toll among their members and spare resources. Mediators managed to craft several pacts among local groups to divvy up coveted turf. Late in 2023, reports emerged that the country's two main gang coalitions had merged into one platform; their first joint offensive began months later.

Alongside its violent expansion, Viv Ansanm has sought to transform its public profile from that of a predatory criminal force into that of an ideological crusader. Crime bosses say their mission is to protect the poorest Haitians from rapacious elites and colonial powers that historically have oppressed this black Caribbean nation. Chérizier and other gang leaders have even announced the creation of a new political party, albeit without taking the steps needed to register it formally. While continuing to enrich themselves at the expense of Haitians rich and poor, their message has nevertheless become more overtly political: they appear intent on guaranteeing that their allies are part of the next administration, which should be formed by 7 February 2026 to

replace the current transitional government. The concrete result they aspire to is a general amnesty for leaders and members.

Haiti and its foreign partners are looking to beef up their ability to respond to the gangs with force. The UN Security Council has approved a new security operation, dubbed the Gang Suppression Force, to replace the Kenya-led Multinational Security Support Mission, which started up in 2024 but has never had the personnel or resources needed to check the gangs. The new force aims to incorporate 5,500 military personnel and expects to draw on reliable funding. Its mandate appears to give it more operational independence and the leeway to adopt more aggressive tactics. But until the force's deployment, which is expected to commence around April 2026, Haiti's authorities will have to turn to other methods. A task force, led by Haiti's prime minister and powered by U.S. private military companies, has already used drones to hit gang members in their urban strongholds, killing over 200 people. Foreign partners are also providing training to the newly reconstituted army. Meanwhile, citizens exhausted by the threat to their neighbourhoods have established self-defence groups, provoking a brutal riposte from the gangs.

A well-resourced, properly informed and expertly commanded Gang Suppression Force could help change the balance of force on the ground and push the gangs onto the back foot. Port-au-Prince and its foreign counterparts, however, must take care to mitigate the dangers of civilian casualties and violations of human rights, ensuring that robust accountability systems are in place. Once the force is up and running, the Haitian government should also overcome the coordination failures that have plagued previous security campaigns. In particular, the government should appoint members to the National Security Council and ask them to design a strategy that lays out each institution's role in fighting the gangs.

Even so, it remains unlikely that force alone will entirely extricate gangs from the communities they control or sever the nexus with politics that has bedevilled Haiti for over half a century. Though informal negotiations with gangs take place on a regular basis – to gain access to people in need of humanitarian aid or to keep businesses open – many Haitians oppose the idea of formal dialogue with the perpetrators of crimes they consider unforgivable. Government officials have correctly said the Haitian state cannot engage in talks from a position of weakness. But if the new multinational force and revamped Haitian security forces allow the authorities to gain the upper hand and broadcast their armed superiority, state officials should look to use dialogue as a means of convincing the gangs to cut their losses, reduce violence against civilians and, eventually, demobilise.

While that happens, the administration, with the support of donors, should expand the program that is now providing exit ramps for minors in the gangs' ranks. In cooperation with international experts, it should also start to design a transitional justice system that provides benefits and a measure of judicial reprieve to those who disarm and cooperate with the authorities, while also guaranteeing that there will be no general impunity.

It is hard to underestimate the damage gangs have wrought in Haiti, killing and raping thousands, creating the hemisphere's worst humanitarian crisis and destroying the lives of millions. Understandably, many Haitians refuse to contemplate responding to the horrors they have endured with anything less than crushing retaliation. But even if the Gang Suppression Force lives up to its promise, it is hard to compute the possible cost in lives and resources of a campaign to destroy the gangs. At some stage, negotiations from a position of strength aimed at protecting civilians and disarming the gangs would serve Haiti far better as a first step on the long path to stability.

Port-au-Prince/New York/London/Brussels, 15 December 2025

Undoing Haiti's Deadly Gang Alliance

I. Introduction

Illegal armed groups have formed part of Haiti's political landscape for decades. Francois Duvalier, the dictator known as "Papa Doc", relied on a network of hired thugs to win the 1957 presidential election. Once in office, Duvalier turned them into a feared militia known as the Tonton Macoutes. They soon outnumbered the Haitian army, enabling Duvalier to consolidate his grip with ruthless repression of opposition.¹ Since then, most presidents have turned to paramilitary forces to maintain power and suppress dissent.² The lineage of the gangs currently terrorising Haiti goes back to the *chimères* of the late 1990s, small armed groups supported by Fanmi Lavalas, the party of former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide.³ Some Haitians referred to these as *baz* (base), a name that several criminal outfits still use, though with time "gangs" became the most common label.⁴

Politicians and business elites capitalised on these gangs from the turn of the millennium, using them to intimidate opponents, boost the chances of victory for their candidates in elections, protect businesses and attack economic rivals.⁵ UN peacekeepers launched a campaign against gangs in 2007, managing to keep a lid on the violence they perpetrated. Over the course of a thirteen-year mission, however, these same UN forces were implicated in hundreds of cases of sexual abuse. Poor sanitation at a base for Nepalese peacekeepers resulted in a cholera epidemic, killing thousands. The peacekeepers' departure was welcomed by many Haitians. But it left a vacuum that the under-resourced national police force – widely compromised by gang accomplices within its ranks – was unable to fill.⁶

¹Tonton Macoutes is the common moniker for the National Security Volunteers, created in 1959. The name comes from a Haitian folktale about a bogeyman who kidnaps disobedient children; the reference was appropriate, because the Tonton Macoutes often abducted people at night. Up to 60,000 people were killed under the dictatorship of Duvalier and his son. Laurent Dubois, *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History* (New York, 2012), pp. 311-359.

²Crisis Group Latin America & Caribbean Briefing N°44, *Haiti: A Path to Stability for a Nation in Shock*, 30 September 2021.

³Crisis Group Latin America & Caribbean Report N°10, *A New Chance for Haiti?*, 18 November 2004, p. 2.

⁴Chelsea L. Kivland, *Street Sovereigns: Young Men and the Makeshift State in Urban Haiti* (New York, 2020).

⁵Crisis Group Briefing, *Haiti: A Path to Stability for a Nation in Shock*, op. cit.

⁶Crisis Group Latin America & Caribbean Briefing N°49, *Haiti's Gangs: Can a Foreign Mission Break Their Stranglehold?*, 5 January 2024.

Matters took a turn for the worse after President Jovenel Moïse was murdered in the early morning of 7 July 2021.⁷ Gangs were quick to exploit the power struggle among would-be successors to the slain president, seizing the opportunity to expand their turf, ranks and arsenals.⁸ Ariel Henry, anointed interim prime minister shortly after the assassination with the blessing of foreign diplomats, called on the UN Secretary-General to deploy a foreign force to help Haitian police halt the gangs' advances in late 2022. A year later, the UN Security Council authorised the deployment of a Kenya-led multinational security mission.⁹

Underfunded and short-staffed, the mission has achieved little.¹⁰ Violence has raged on. Marauding gangs account for large proportions of the 16,000 people who have been killed since 2022 and the 1.4 million – 12 per cent of the population – who have been displaced.¹¹ The national palace, ministries, courts, prisons, police stations, schools and hospitals have been damaged or destroyed, forcing authorities to relocate over 100 public institutions.¹² More than 1,600 schools are currently closed; a quarter are occupied by gangs. A lack of educational opportunities and widespread poverty have in turn fuelled gang recruitment of children, which surged by 70 per cent in 2024.¹³ Sexual violence is rampant, and more than half the population suffers from acute food insecurity.¹⁴ In his speech to the UN General Assembly in September 2025, Laurent Saint-Cyr, head of the Transitional Presidential Council (one of the two executive bodies of the current gov-

⁷ Mariano de Alba, "Handling the Aftermath of Haiti's Presidential Assassination", Crisis Group Commentary, 23 July 2021.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ In October 2023, the UN Security Council authorised the deployment of a non-UN multinational mission led by Kenya, tasked with supporting the Haitian police's anti-gang operations, as well as securing critical infrastructure and transport hubs. See Crisis Group Briefing, *Haiti's Gangs: Can a Foreign Mission Break Their Stranglehold?*, op. cit., pp. 11-14; Crisis Group Latin America & Caribbean Report N°107, *Locked in Transition: Politics and Violence in Haiti*, 19 February 2025, pp. 19-21.

¹⁰ Crisis Group Briefing, *Haiti's Gangs: Can a Foreign Mission Break Their Stranglehold?*, op. cit., pp. 11-14; Crisis Group Report, *Locked in Transition: Politics and Violence in Haiti*, op. cit., pp. 19-21.

¹¹ "High Commissioner Türk updates Human Rights Council on Haiti: We can – and must – turn this situation around", UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), 2 October 2025; "Haiti – Report on the displacement situation in Haiti – Round 11", International Organisation for Migration, September 2025.

¹² "Assault on Martissant – June 1, 2021, The Beginning of the So-Called 'Lost Territories', the Surge in Gang Violence, and the Establishment of their Dominance", Centre d'analyse et de recherche en droits de l'homme, 1 June 2025.

¹³ "Haiti: Child recruitment by armed groups surges 70 per cent", UN News, 24 November 2024.

¹⁴ "UN Special Representative Patten urges for immediate action as sexual violence surges amid gang violence in Haiti", press release, UN Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH), 4 June 2025; "Analyse IPC de l'insécurité alimentaire aiguë, Septembre 2025-Juin 2026", Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, 10 October 2025.

ernment, alongside the prime minister's office), declared that Haiti is at war with the criminal groups.¹⁵ Many Haitians agree.¹⁶

This report examines the reconfiguration of Haitian gangs and provides recommendations for how to address the challenges they pose to Haiti's stability. It is based on over 300 interviews conducted between February 2022 and November 2025 with victims, residents, former gang members, members of self-defence groups and experts, as well as state officials, representatives of the private sector, diplomats and members of the security forces in Port-au-Prince, New York, Nairobi and other cities. Approximately one third of the interviews were with women, mostly representing civil society organisations and local communities. Most officials in the Haitian state, as well as members of the private sector, diplomatic corps, security forces and non-state armed groups, are men, reflecting the gendered distribution of power in politics, business, law enforcement and the criminal underworld.

¹⁵ “Radio Télévision Caraïbes: Discours de Laurent Saint Cyr, à la 80ème session ordinaire de l'Assemblée Générale des Nations Unies”, video, YouTube, 25 September 2025.

¹⁶ Tom Phillips and Etienne Côté-Paluck, “‘This is effectively a civil war’: Despair in Haiti as gangs step up assault on capital”, *The Guardian*, 30 October 2024.

II. Gangs United

In late February 2024, Haitian gangs launched a wave of coordinated attacks across Port-au-Prince.¹⁷ While the assault took many by surprise, prominent gang figures including Jimmy Chérizier (alias Barbecue), Christ-Roi Chéry and Iscard Andrice had long understood that an alliance among the most powerful illegal armed groups in the capital would boost their power and profits.

A. The Emergence of Rival Gang Factions

The first attempts to create a broad gang coalition date to 2018, when criminal figures in the capital began to discuss uniting their forces. Some government officials encouraged this effort, hoping it would be easier to negotiate demobilisation with a unified gang command than with multiple smaller criminal outfits.¹⁸ In June 2020, nine powerful gangs and several other minor groups joined forces. Over the following months, the coalition – officially, the Revolutionary Forces G9 Family and Allies, Mess with One, Mess with All, commonly known as the G9 – launched attacks on criminal groups that refused to join.¹⁹ Chérizier, a former police officer turned gang leader, became the G9's spokesperson and one of its most influential figures, although this prominence has at times given the erroneous impression that he is its military chief.²⁰

In response to attacks from the G9, gang leader Gabriel Jean Pierre – known as “Ti Gabriel” – along with other crime bosses who had refused to sign up to Chérizier's group joined a front known as Gpèp, or “the people's eyes” in Haitian Creole.²¹ Functioning more as a

¹⁷ Crisis Group Report, *Locked in Transition: Politics and Violence in Haiti*, op. cit.

¹⁸ A spokesperson for the state National Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Commission acknowledged in 2020 that the commission had encouraged gang leaders to form a coalition to pave the way for negotiations with the government. Danio Darius, “Les gangs se sont fédérés sur proposition de la Commission nationale de désarmement, démantèlement et réinsertion”, *Le Nouvelliste*, 2 September 2020.

¹⁹ Gangs such as Village de Dieu and Grand Ravine, which operate on the southern outskirts of the capital, joined the G9 for a time, but left the coalition within months. Kettia JP Taylor, “Les gangs du ‘Village de Dieu’ rejoignent le G9, le Bicentenaire se dégagé peu à peu”, *Haiti Infos Pro*, 1 January 2020. Crisis Group telephone interview, Haitian gang expert, 16 July 2022.

²⁰ The gang led by Barbecue, along with others headed by aliases Djouma, Ezekiel, Iskar, Krisla, Mathias, Mikanor, Sonson and Ti Junior, formed the G9 coalition. Chérizier, as spokesperson of the new alliance, said the group aimed to combat gangs involved in kidnapping, truck hijackings and sexual violence. Despite proof to the contrary, he denied that the G9 had links to the administration of President Moïse or opposition forces. The original video announcing the G9's creation, posted on YouTube in June 2020, is no longer available online.

²¹ Among the gangs that were part of the Gpèp were those led by aliases Izo, Jeff Gwo Lwa, Kempes, Lanmo San Jou, Ti Gabriel, Ti Lapli, Ti Makkak and Vitel-homme. Crisis Group interview, Port-au-Prince, 28 March 2025.

platform for tactical military coordination than an organised alliance like the G9, groups in the Gpèp aimed primarily to thwart rival gang offensives, with each leader retaining full autonomy to engage in whichever criminal activities he chose.²²

B. The Road to Compromise

Between 2020 and 2024, fighting between the G9 and Gpèp spiked as the gangs intensified their arms race, recruitment campaigns and pursuit of new sources of revenue. Even so, a number of rival gangs negotiated ceasefires between the end of 2022 and mid-2023. Local facilitators arranged for a truce at the end of 2022 between the Village de Dieu and Grand Ravine gangs (affiliated with Gpèp) and Ti Bwa (aligned with the G9). Then, in 2023, the Gpèp signed a ceasefire with three of the most powerful gangs affiliated with the G9, which had spent the previous three years laying siege to Ti Gabriel's stronghold in Cité Soleil.²³ Locals were relieved when the truces tempered inter-gang combat. Nonetheless, kidnapping, extortion and sexual violence remained widespread.²⁴

Gang efforts to hammer out a broad-based alliance redoubled when Kenya offered in August 2023 to lead a multinational security mission.²⁵ Following Nairobi's announcement, Chérizier hinted that all the rival gangs could join forces to fight the African police officers. "If [Kenyan agents] come to the poor neighbourhoods and start shooting and killing, we Haitians will rise up and fight to the last drop of our blood", he warned. "And it will not be a fight by the G9 or the Gpèp, it will be a fight by the Haitian people to preserve the dignity of our country".²⁶

A month later, Chérizier announced the creation of a united front between the G9 and the Gpèp, called Viv Ansanm ("Live Together" in Haitian Creole), to overthrow the government headed by then-Prime

²² Some of the gangs under the Gpèp banner, including Kraze Barye and 400 Mawozo, continued to fight turf wars over adjacent territories. According to experts, Gpèp functioned as a decentralised network that engaged in military cooperation based on the logic of "the enemy of my enemy is my friend". Crisis Group interviews, Haitian gang experts, 22 May 2022; resident of gang-controlled area, Port-au-Prince, 29 November 2023.

²³ The truce was brokered partly by Father Tom Hagan, a priest from the U.S. who said he had built on an existing agreement between Chérizier, Mathias Saintil and Iskar Andrice, on one side, and Ti Gabriel, on the other, to avoid fighting at night. Jacqueline Charles, "With help from American priest, four Haiti gang leaders have called a truce. Can it last?", *Miami Herald*, 16 July 2023.

²⁴ Crisis Group telephone interview, Haitian human rights defender, 7 September 2024. Crisis Group interview, bus driver, Port-au-Prince, 28 November 2024.

See also Azaine Mauryle, "L'accord de paix conclu entre les gangs ne suffit pas, ils doivent déposer ou remettre leurs armes", *Vant Bèf Info*, 13 December 2022.

²⁵ "Kenya ready to lead multinational force to Haiti", *Reuters*, 29 July 2023.

²⁶ "Tripotay Lakay: Jimmy Cherizier di lap antre nan gè ak fòs etranje Kenya yo depi yo pa", video, YouTube, 16 August 2023.

Minister Henry.²⁷ The initial phase of the alliance was short-lived, as the killing of gang leader alias Tyson triggered clashes, both within the G9 and between the G9 and Gpè, for control of his former territory.²⁸ But even as fighting between gangs resumed – driving violence to its highest levels in over two years – the leaders remained in communication through a shared messaging group, continuing to debate the merits of making a non-aggression pact in order to battle the authorities together. These moves were due in no small part to gang leaders' concerns that the foreign mission approved by the UN Security Council in October 2023 might undermine their position.

C. *A Resilient Alliance?*

The large-scale, coordinated attacks launched simultaneously across Port-au-Prince in late February 2024 were the first sign of the gangs' resolve to cooperate militarily.²⁹ The attacks started on the day that former Prime Minister Henry arrived in Nairobi to oversee the signing of an agreement to deploy Kenyan police officers to Haiti as part of the new multinational force.³⁰

Viv Ansanm's siege of Port-au-Prince overwhelmed Haiti's security forces and paralysed the capital. An initial wave of attacks targeted critical infrastructure and public buildings across the capital, hitting the airport, presidential palace, prisons, seaports, police stations and the force's academy.³¹ With Henry blocked from returning to Haiti, political groups and foreign diplomats embarked on urgent talks about creating a new transitional government.³² Chérizier protested that Viv

²⁷ "Press Lakay News: Jwèt la gate, Babekyou, G9, G-PEP, Izo, Vitelom, Lanmò Sanjou Zam ala men pou ranvèse Ariel Henry", video, YouTube, 19 September 2023. At the time, Henry was in New York rallying support for a foreign mission. Over half a dozen leaders of rival gangs – including Barbecue, Chen Mechan, Izo, Jeff Gwo Lwa, Krisla, Lanmo San Jou and Vitelhomme – confirmed Viv Ansanm's existence through voice notes that circulated on social media.

²⁸ After Tyson was killed by members of his own coalition, the death of Iscard Andrice – one of the G9's three main founders – disrupted relations among several gangs that controlled strategic parts of Cité Soleil, one of the main battlegrounds. Iscard was described by several sources as the "real mastermind" behind the G9 coalition. "Au moins 6 présumés bandits tués à Cité Soleil dont le nommé Tyson", Planet Press, 27 September 2023. Crisis Group interviews, residents, Port-au-Prince, November 2023.

²⁹ The gangs currently part of Viv Ansanm include 400 Mawozo, 5 Segonn (Village-de-Dieu), Bel-Air (Les Argentins), Belekou, Boston, Chen Mechan, Delmas 6, Fort Dimanche, Grand Ravine, Izo 2 (Kenscoff), Kokorat San Ras, Kraze Baryè, Krache Dife, La Saline, Mariani, Pierre VI, Gran Grif (Savien), Simon Pelé, Taliban (Canaan), Terre Noire, Ti Bwa, Tokyo and Wharf Jérémie.

³⁰ For more details on this large-scale offensive, see Diego Da Rin, "Will a New Government Halt Haiti's Nosedive?", Crisis Group Commentary, 21 March 2024.

³¹ See Crisis Watch, Haiti entries, March-May 2024.

³² With Henry unable to return to Haiti, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the U.S. and other foreign partners convened a summit in Jamaica on 11 March.

Ansanm has been excluded from the new political arrangements, saying “as long as [the gangs] are not at the table, the country will never be at peace”.³³

Gangs kept Port-au-Prince at a standstill for several months, even as the new presidential council was appointed and the first U.S. military flights arrived in the capital to prepare for the foreign security mission’s deployment. Once it became apparent that their joint operations were keeping the new transitional government on the back foot, gang leaders crafted a more formal collaboration. They coordinated their military operations and struck agreements to delimit turf and distribute revenues from extortion and other rackets.³⁴ Viv Ansanm continued to be governed as it has been since its inception, with no gang leader formally holding authority over the others. Decisions that affect the entire alliance, particularly on strategy, are made following consultations with leaders of all member gangs.³⁵

Viv Ansanm’s offensives have ebbed and flowed. The first wave of large-scale attacks lasted from February 2024 until the official formation of the new government three months later. When the first deployment of Kenyan officers arrived in June, the gangs scaled back their attacks, only for these to tick back up in October 2024, once it became clear the mission was understaffed and underfunded. These attacks have continued, with bouts of intense violence.³⁶

They brought together representatives of Haiti’s main political and social groups, urging them to form a new transitional authority until elections could be held. The result was a nine-member Transitional Presidential Council that would work alongside a prime minister. See Crisis Group Report, *Locked in Transition: Politics and Violence in Haiti*, op. cit.

³³ “Haiti gang leader will consider ceasefire but warns foreign forces will be treated as ‘invaders’”, Sky News, 29 March 2024.

³⁴ Crisis Group interviews, gang analysts, Port-au-Prince, 4 July and 23 October 2024.

³⁵ Chérizier says he is president and spokesperson of the coalition, but he does not have authority over other leaders. In late 2024, he was forbidden from speaking on the coalition’s behalf for almost a month, for undisclosed reasons. “Mise sous sanction du Président et Porte-parole du regroupement ‘Vivre Ensemble’”, statement, Christla, Jeff Gwo Lwa and Lanmo 100 Jou, 26 November 2024.

³⁶ The last months of 2025 have seen an uptick in fighting as gangs retaliate against the Haitian police, which has stepped up operations in several gang-controlled areas in the capital in collaboration with the multinational security mission and foreign contractors. On 13 November, marines protecting the U.S. embassy were attacked by gang members. The next day, gangs allegedly shot at a helicopter being flown by members of a private military company, forcing it to make an emergency landing in the Santo area of the capital. A week later, a commercial plane was also shot at while landing at the capital’s airport, although it is not clear if gangs were responsible. Juhakenson Blaise, “US Marines return fire after attack on embassy in Haiti amid escalating gang clashes”, *The Haitian Times*, 16 November 2025; Jacqueline Charles, “Haiti police seize high-powered ‘weapon of war’, kill several gang members”, *Miami Herald*, 16 November 2025; Jacqueline Charles, “Haiti’s Sunrise Airways suspends domestic flights after bullet hits aircraft”, *Miami Herald*, 23 November 2025.

Many observers were sceptical that Viv Ansanm would last more than a few months, given the gangs' long history of volatile alliances and failed attempts to join forces.³⁷ Internal tensions have indeed at times threatened to fracture the united front, while conflicts among gang leaders have not completely abated.³⁸ But by now the vast majority of gangs have agreed to be part of Viv Ansanm.³⁹ Tellingly, no gang has left the coalition since its creation, and others that were not initially part of the alliance have enlisted.

This discipline has allowed Viv Ansanm to alternate between periods of fierce offensives and phases in which they adopt a more defensive posture, focusing on protecting strongholds and newly acquired territories. By joining forces, Viv Ansanm has achieved a level of military might far beyond anything previously seen among Haiti's gangs. While exact data is unavailable, experts estimate that Viv Ansanm could collectively have between 12,000 and 20,000 members, of whom 3,000 are heavily armed.⁴⁰ The alliance has enabled rapid expansion into new areas such as Kenscoff – located in the mountains overlooking the affluent neighbourhood of Pétion-Ville in the capital – and several important towns in the Centre department. Both are regions where gangs had not previously established a permanent foothold.⁴¹ Rivalries

³⁷ Former Prime Minister Henry dismissed the alliance early on, saying “a pump-kin does not produce a calabash, and gangs cannot live together”. Kervens Adam Paul, “Les bandits ne seront jamais des artisans de la paix”, a déclaré le Premier ministre Henry”, *Le Nouvelliste*, 25 September 2023.

³⁸ Disagreements among leaders within Viv Ansanm – mainly over turf boundaries and distribution of illicit revenues – escalated into open fighting on two occasions. In September 2024, alias Mathias clashed with alias Djouma, who had escaped from prison that March and had been attempting to reclaim the area that he previously controlled. In the second case, in June 2025, tensions over turf boundaries and a new illegal road toll established in the border between gang-controlled areas triggered clashes between the Chen Mechan and 400 Mawozo gangs. In both cases, fighting lasted no more than three days before being resolved through mediation by other gang leaders in the coalition. Crisis Group interviews, Port-au-Prince, April 2025; and by telephone, June 2025. See also “Football match sparks gang war in Cité Soleil”, *Haiti Libre*, 13 September 2024; Jonasson Odigène, “Affrontements armés: deux chefs de gang tués en moins de 48 heures à Carrefour Marrassa”, *Le Nouvelliste*, 9 June 2025.

³⁹ Early on, prominent gangs – including Brooklyn led by alias Ti Gabriel and Wharf Jérémie headed by Micanor Altès – refused to join the emerging alliance. Ti Gabriel operates in the Brooklyn neighbourhood of Cité Soleil and Micanor Altès controls the area of Wharf Jérémie – both strategic territories located in the vicinity of the capital's two main ports. Chérizier and alias Jeff Gwo Lwa convinced Gabriel and Altès to collaborate with Viv Ansanm, though they are not formally part of the coalition's collective decision-making. Crisis Group interviews, local leaders and gang analysts, Port-au-Prince, March-April 2025.

⁴⁰ Crisis Group interviews, Port-au-Prince, 24 November 2025.

⁴¹ In July, during the traditional Haitian pilgrimage to Saut d'Eau to honour the Virgin Mary, gang leaders Jeff Gwo Lwa, Lanmo San Jou and Chérizier made a public appearance, accompanied by an elite unit formed in 2024 by the Ti Bwa gang, known as Backup 100 Plak. The January 2025 offensive on Kenscoff involved contingents from five different gangs. “Flash report on the events in Kenscoff”, BINUH and OHCHR, 7 April 2025.

once thought irreconcilable have faded: rival gang leaders alias Izo and alias Krisla, for instance, now attend the same parties and have even recorded songs together.⁴²

⁴² Krisla and Izo were respectively affiliated with the G9 and the GPèp before coming together under the Viv Ansanm umbrella. Controlling adjacent territories, they spent several years engaged in fierce clashes over a stretch of national road at the southern entrance of Port-au-Prince. One of their recent musical collaborations is the song “Adrese w a chef” (“Report to the Boss” in Haitian Creole). “Chrisla ft. Izo Vilaj De dye – Adresew a Chef”, video, YouTube, 22 March 2025.

III. The Changing Nature of Haiti's Gangs

Over the last few years, gangs have gone from being armies for hire at the service of powerful elites to becoming independent forces working in fast-changing partnerships with the highest bidder. They have consolidated their grip on territory, boosted their illicit revenues and, it seems, deepened their involvement in drug trafficking. In the course of building their power, they have extracted a brutal toll on the Haitian people, who have frequently been the victims of uncontrolled violence.

A. Elite Connections

Relations between Haitian gangs and the country's elites have changed markedly in recent years. As noted above, political forces, first the left-wing political party Fanmi Lavalas and later others, exploited the armed organisations known as *baz* that were active in densely populated slums of Port-au-Prince and other major cities.⁴³ Politicians negotiated access for their candidates to these neighbourhoods during electoral campaigns, seeking the *baz*'s help to mobilise votes or to sabotage polling stations – including by destroying ballot boxes – whenever election results promised to turn out unfavourably.⁴⁴ In return, they received material support for their communities. These benefits included generators to power street lighting and the appointment of gang members to low-level posts in public administration; over time, gangs were also handed more funds and weapons.⁴⁵ Influential members of these groups became power brokers.

Eventually, the ties between these small armed outfits and the Lavalas party frayed, and gangs increasingly turned to criminal practices to boost their income. Businesspeople started contracting them to protect their own firms or to undermine competitors.⁴⁶ For the past two decades, elites have also used gangs to steer or quell public demonstrations, whether for or against incumbent governments.⁴⁷

Gangs are no longer subordinate to their patrons, however. As the G9 and the Gpèp fought to impose their control upon the capital, gangs proved willing to ally with any suitor able to provide them with funds and weapons. Longstanding loyalties to specific business or political elites evaporated and alliances became increasingly fluid and trans-

⁴³ Kivland, *Street Sovereigns: Young Men and the Makeshift State in Urban Haiti*, op. cit.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid. Crisis Group interview, social leader, Port-au-Prince, 28 November 2023.

⁴⁶ Crisis Group interview, Haitian businessperson, Port-au-Prince, 24 June 2025.

⁴⁷ Some of the best documented cases are the massacres allegedly perpetrated by gangs in La Saline, Bel-Air and Cité Soleil between 2019 and 2020 to break up anti-government demonstrations. See Crisis Group Latin America & Caribbean Briefing N°48, *Haiti's Last Resort: Gangs and the Prospect of Foreign Intervention*, 14 December 2022, p. 4.

actional.⁴⁸ Meanwhile, as gangs became more powerful militarily and controlled larger swathes of the capital and beyond, the crime bosses started shunning their former patrons' orders, instead demanding larger sums from them or directing their campaigns of violence in accordance with their own objectives.⁴⁹

B. Viv Ansanm's Criminal Enterprises

As their ranks and firepower have grown, gangs have diversified their funding sources and consolidated various systems for extracting illicit profits. Alongside getting funds and weapons from influential Haitian politicians and business leaders, the groups obtain revenue from sources including protection rackets, illegal road tolls, kidnapping for ransom and sex trafficking. Reportedly, their involvement in drug and arms trafficking is deepening as well.⁵⁰ While extortion is not new, it has grown at breakneck speed. Gangs began by targeting small business owners who had no way of resisting armed threats. Over time, they systematised the collection of illegal taxes, profiting from all existing commerce in areas they controlled – including street vendors' paltry earnings from selling food and other essential goods.⁵¹ As they got stronger, gangs were able to extort larger businesses in their bastions, including bus companies, car dealerships, power plants and factories, as well as firms at industrial parks and seaports.⁵²

Extortion has since extended to the collection of illegal tolls. In mid-2021, gangs seized control of a stretch of the national highway connecting Port-au-Prince with southern regions; since then, they have taken over several other roads leading out of the capital.⁵³ This move proved lucrative: gangs are now charging \$1,500 per truck per month to operate in the area, in addition to \$190 for each trip from the

⁴⁸ For a deeper analysis of the overlap between politics and violence in Haiti, see Crisis Group Report, *Locked in Transition: Politics and Violence in Haiti*, op. cit.

⁴⁹ Crisis Group interview, Haitian politician, Port-au-Prince, 24 October 2024.

⁵⁰ There is growing concern that gangs might be involved in transnational criminal networks engaged in human trafficking for migration or sexual purposes, as well as in organ trafficking. "Haiti: UN expert William O'Neill concludes official visit", OHCHR, 28 June 2023.

⁵¹ Crisis Group interview, human rights defender, Port-Au-Prince, 28 March 2025.

⁵² Gangs are now demanding fees from families who want to bury relatives in at least four of the capital's largest cemeteries, in effect replacing the state tax collection for this service. Fenel Pélissier, "Gangs are taxing corpses in Port-au-Prince", *Ayibopost*, 23 June 2025.

⁵³ Viv Ansanm-affiliated gangs now control all the gateways to Port-au-Prince. They hold National Road 2 to the south, large sections of National Road 1 to the north in both the Ouest and Artibonite departments, and more than half of National Road 8 to the Malpasse border crossing with the Dominican Republic. Since April, when they seized the cities of Mirebalais and Saut d'Eau, gangs greatly expanded their presence in the Centre department, consolidating their grip on parts of National Road 3 and other smaller byways.

region's ports.⁵⁴ Haiti's finance minister estimates that gangs earn a further \$60 to \$75 million annually from extorting shipments coming from the neighbouring Dominican Republic.⁵⁵ Payments are also collected at checkpoints set up throughout Port-au-Prince, where vehicles, pedestrians and even children going to school are assessed a fee.⁵⁶ The cumulative effects of these tolls has been to drive up the costs of goods transported by land, while communities that try not to pay have been on the receiving end of brutal reprisals.⁵⁷

Kidnappings for ransom are another source of income for gangs, particularly for groups in the Gpèp criminal coalition (since the creation of Viv Ansanm, Chérizier has tried to persuade other gang leaders to abandon the practice).⁵⁸ While abductions have decreased in number over the past year, kidnappings of wealthy individuals and foreigners continue.⁵⁹ Women are often raped during captivity, with gangs using sexual violence to strong-arm families into paying the ransom.⁶⁰ The Gran Ravine gang kidnapped six UNICEF staff members in July; the next month, eight people, including an Irish nun, were seized from an orphanage in the Kenscoff area by the gang led by alias Izo 2. They were all released after weeks in captivity.⁶¹

For the past year, gangs have resorted to maritime theft and kidnapping as well, targeting small boats and medium-size cargo vessels in Port-au-Prince Bay and kidnapping passengers transiting between

⁵⁴ Crisis Group interview, businessman, Port-au-Prince, 2 April 2025.

⁵⁵ Roberson Alphonse, "Pour couper l'accès aux gangs à des millions de dollars par mois", *Le Nouvelliste*, 29 April 2025.

⁵⁶ Jean Gilles Désinord, "Port-au-Prince: Un péage illégal au centre-ville – la population rançonnée par les gangs", *Vant Bèf Info*, 8 May 2025.

⁵⁷ In October 2024, the Gran Grif gang, which operates in the Artibonite department and is part of Viv Ansanm, massacred at least 70 people in the city of Pont-Sondé, accusing the population of using rural routes to bypass the tolls the gang had imposed on the main road in that area. Jacqueline Charles, "Gang massacre in Haiti town raises questions about effectiveness of international force", *Miami Herald*, 4 October 2024.

⁵⁸ "I want to take this opportunity to send a message to all the guys in Viv Ansanm: no country can develop with kidnapping. ... We need to stop kidnapping: it's a way to show the whole world that it's not those of us who have weapons who are the problem". "Tele Ginen: Pòt pawòl Viv Ansanm lan Babekyou salye desizyon gwoup ame yo nan Site Solèy pran pou fè lapè", video, YouTube, 25 July 2024.

⁵⁹ After reaching an all-time high of nearly 2,500 in 2024, the number of kidnappings has fallen slightly. Sources told Crisis Group that in 2024 gangs managed to extract ransoms as high as \$1 million for the release of a kidnapped person. Crisis Group interviews, Port-au-Prince, April 2025. See also "United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti: Report of the Secretary-General", UNSC S/2025/418, 27 June 2025, pp. 4, 16.

⁶⁰ "Haiti: 'Cataclysmic' situation demands immediate and bold action", press release, OHCHR, 28 March 2024.

⁶¹ Frances Robles, "UNICEF employees held hostage for 3 weeks in Haiti", *The New York Times*, 29 July 2025; Tom Phillips, "Eight people kidnapped from Haitian orphanage released after three weeks", *The Guardian*, 31 August 2025.

Gonâve Island and the Haitian mainland.⁶² Some gangs, including Village de Dieu and Canaan, have an array of speedboats; others, like Wharf Jérémie and Ti Bwa, which control coastal areas of the capital, have recently acquired vessels with the aim of carrying out more heists at sea.⁶³

That said, certain changes in criminal behaviour hint that gangs may now be receiving an increasing share of their revenues from drug trafficking. Haitian police and law enforcement agencies in neighbouring countries have seized various large shipments of narcotics in recent months, arresting Haitian nationals in the process.⁶⁴ In July, the Haitian police conducted the largest drug seizure in the force's 30-year history, intercepting more than one tonne of cocaine off Île de la Tortue, in the north of the country.⁶⁵ Officials from the National Commission for the Fight against Drugs nevertheless told Crisis Group they were "unable to determine the scale of the problem".⁶⁶

For decades, Haiti has served as a corridor for drug trafficking, primarily in cocaine and cannabis. These drugs enter the country through ports (some now controlled by gangs) as well as clandestine airstrips, before being shipped to the U.S., the Dominican Republic and Western Europe.⁶⁷ While corrupt officials and economic elites have been

⁶² Two incidents have drawn attention to growing gang activity at sea: the April 2024 hijacking of a cargo ship, from which gangs stole around 10,000 sacks of rice before the police were able to recover it, and the September 2024 kidnapping of two Filipino crew members from a cargo vessel in the Port-au-Prince harbour. Crisis Group interview, Port-au-Prince, 18 October 2024. See also "Haiti police recover hijacked cargo ship in rare victory after 5-hour shootout with gangs", Associated Press, 9 April 2024; Jean Daniel Sénat, "Deux marins étrangers enlevés dans la rade de Port-au-Prince", *Le Nouvelliste*, 11 September 2024. Until early 2025, the Haitian coast guard had only four patrol boats, three of which were either not working or poorly maintained. The guard has recently received four new boats donated by the U.S., though none are armoured. Crisis Group interview, UN official, 29 May 2025.

⁶³ Video footage posted online shows motorboats with the Ti Bwa gang's markings on their hulls. Post on TikTok by @roikelme, 18 May 2025.

⁶⁴ In May, Dominican authorities seized 2.7 tonnes of marijuana from Jamaica that had transited Haiti by truck. Two months later, police intercepted over 1.3 tonnes of marijuana along the Toms River in Jamaica, arresting five people, including two Haitians. "Cargamento de marihuana ocupado en Pedernales tuvo peso de 5937 libras", press release, Dirección Nacional de Control de Drogas (Dominican Republic), 17 May 2025; "Major drug bust: three charged in guns-for-drugs crackdown", press release, Jamaica Constabulary Force, 24 July 2025.

⁶⁵ Three suspected drug traffickers from The Bahamas and Jamaica were killed in a shootout with police during the operation. "Police in Haiti seize a ton of cocaine in a boat raid that leaves 3 suspects dead", Associated Press, 15 July 2025.

⁶⁶ Crisis Group interview, Port-au-Prince, 4 July 2024.

⁶⁷ "Letter dated 12 October 2023 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council", UNSC S/2023/780, 18 October 2023. At a U.S. Senate hearing, FBI director Kash Patel said much of the cocaine leaving South America uses transshipment points in Haiti before reaching the U.S., though U.S. authorities have provided no evidence to support this claim. "AP: FBI Director Kash Patel testifies at Senate hearing", video, YouTube, 16 September 2025.

implicated in both drug and arms trafficking, experts note that gangs are increasingly embedding themselves directly in the supply chains.⁶⁸

Viv Ansanm's grip on long stretches of national highways in at least three departments, combined with gangs' maritime operations, makes them well equipped to move drugs from South America toward northern markets. A Haitian intelligence officer told Crisis Group that gangs are likely working with criminal groups transporting drugs from Colombia via the Caribbean Sea to the U.S. and Europe.⁶⁹ Haitian gangs also seem to be deepening ties with criminal groups in other Caribbean countries, including Jamaica, with whom they reportedly exchange drugs for firearms.⁷⁰ According to residents, Jamaicans have been seen alongside Haitian gang members in a coastal area of the capital.⁷¹

C. *Gang Violence*

As they have grown richer and more powerful, the gangs have become increasingly brutal. In 2024, murder rates hit a historical peak, with over 5,600 people killed.⁷² Violence has driven internal displacement: more than 1.3 million people, or almost one in every ten Haitians, have been forced to leave home.⁷³ Expanding gang control of key thoroughfares has disrupted supply chains, worsening the hunger crisis in the country, with more than half the population now struggling to feed themselves.⁷⁴ The gangs have embraced a scorched-earth approach in their campaigns to expand their territorial sway, killing civilians indiscriminately, committing mass rapes, kidnapping people, looting and burning down homes, and targeting schools, hospitals and public buildings. Their victims are often the most vulnerable, the very people

⁶⁸ "Letter dated 15 January 2024 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council", UNSC S/2024/79, 17 January 2024.

⁶⁹ Dimitri Herard, a former head of security at Haiti's national palace who was released from prison during Viv Ansanm's large scale attacks in the capital in early 2024, allegedly enabled gangs to establish contact with criminal groups that transport drugs from Colombia via the Caribbean to the U.S. and Europe. The UN Security Council sanctioned Herard in October for working with gangs and helping them traffic arms and ammunition. Crisis Group interviews, Port-au-Prince, 29 June, 3 July 2024. "Letter dated 15 July 2024 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council", UNSC S/2024/554, 16 July 2024, p. 9; "Resolution 2794", UNSC S/RES/2794, 17 October 2025, p. 5.

⁷⁰ "Letter dated 15 January 2024 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council", UNSC S/2024/79, 17 January 2024.

⁷¹ Crisis Group interviews, Port-au-Prince, 8 April 2025.

⁷² "More than 5,600 killed in Haiti gang violence in 2024", UN News, 7 January 2025.

⁷³ "Haiti Sees Record Displacement as 1.3 Million Flee Violence", International Organisation for Migration, 11 June 2025.

⁷⁴ "Analyse IPC de l'insécurité alimentaire aiguë, Septembre 2025-Juin 2026", op. cit.

whom the gangs claim to be standing up for (see more in Section IV below).⁷⁵

Viv Ansanm's show of force has also succeeded in isolating the country. Besides attacking the capital's international airport in March 2024, members of Viv Ansanm fired at a UN helicopter flying over a gang stronghold that October and, according to Haitian authorities, shot at three commercial planes attempting to land and take off from the same airport the next month.⁷⁶ Air traffic has plummeted as a result. Until recently, only domestic flights operated by a local carrier at Port-au-Prince airport, alongside military flights, were taking off from the airport. After another commercial plane was shot at while landing, however, that service has now been suspended as well.⁷⁷

Gangs have also targeted diplomats in Haiti on various occasions, including three attacks on U.S. embassy vehicles in October 2024 and again the following January, as well as recent fire at U.S. marines protecting the embassy.⁷⁸ More recently, gangs seized a telecommunications hub in Kenscoff, which is also critical for the country's aviation safety. They threatened to cut all the cables and set the site ablaze; security forces subsequently regained control of the area, as discussed below.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ As a former resident of the capital's Solino neighbourhood said of the gang coalition: "They call themselves revolutionaries. They've only destroyed my life". See Dánica Coto and Evens Sanon, "UN Security Council approves larger international force to combat gangs in Haiti", Associated Press, 1 October 2025.

⁷⁶ Dánica Coto and Evens Sanon, "Gangs in Haiti open fire and hit a UN helicopter midair as violence surges", Associated Press, 24 October 2024; "Le Conseil Présidentiel de Transition condamne avec véhémence les actes perpétrés contre la population et l'aéronef de Spirit Airlines et celui de Jet Blue", press release, Presidential Communications Office, 12 November 2024.

⁷⁷ Charles, "Haiti's Sunrise Airways suspends domestic flights after bullet hits aircraft", op. cit.

⁷⁸ David Culver and Abel Alvarado, "US to evacuate 20 embassy staff from Haiti following car attack and intensifying gang violence, say sources", CNN, 24 October 2024; Jacqueline Charles, "1 dead, several wounded in Haiti after armed gangs target consular corps armored vehicles", *Miami Herald*, 22 January 2024; Juhakenson Blaise, "US Marines return fire after attack on embassy in Haiti amid escalating gang clashes", *The Haitian Times*, 16 November 2025.

⁷⁹ Jacqueline Charles, "Haiti police lead daring raid to retake key comms hub. It's a rare win in war on gangs", *Miami Herald*, 2 September 2025.

IV. The Politics of Viv Ansanm

Gangs have increasingly sought to portray their battle as motivated by social injustice, though the evidence to support this claim is flimsy at best. Time and again, gang leaders have referred to the elites that originally armed them as the main obstacles to peace. Viv Ansanm claims to be fighting in defence of the downtrodden, and it has adopted a series of symbols linking itself to Haiti's celebrated history of rebellion against oppression. Gangs demand negotiations with the goals of placing allies in government and guaranteeing amnesty for themselves.

A. *Gang Populism*

Viv Ansanm's most public face, Jimmy Chérizier, has consistently sought to portray gangs as espousing political causes. He describes gang members as young nationalists motivated by the prospect of taking down a corrupt system that "exploits people living in the ghettos".⁸⁰ His message often draws on Haitian nationalist symbols, historical references and criticism of the country's elites – a rhetorical strategy many other gang leaders are now imitating.⁸¹

In several instances, gangs have sought to usurp the role of state authorities in historical commemorations. On 17 October 2021, heavy gunfire from G9-affiliated gangs forced then-Prime Minister Henry to flee the annual ceremony honouring Haiti's independence hero Jean-Jacques Dessalines.⁸² Chérizier, dressed in a white suit with a black tie, which is what government officials often wear at formal occasions, lay a wreath. He was surrounded by armed gang members wearing T-shirts featuring a photograph of the late president, Moïse, and the inscription "Justice for Jovenel".⁸³ Since then, Viv Ansanm has continued to mark this date, including by launching coordinated attacks across the capital.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ The original video in which he made this remark, posted on YouTube in June 2020, is no longer available online.

⁸¹ Gang leaders such as Chrisla, Jeff Gwo Lwa and Lanmo San Jou are increasingly active on social media, publishing content aimed at amplifying the coalition's political messages.

⁸² Jean Daniel Sénat, "Le chef de gang Jimmy Chérizier parade au Pont-Rouge après la déroute d'Ariel Henry", *Le Nouvelliste*, 20 October 2021.

⁸³ Chérizier often invokes Dessalines and Moïse in his speeches to urge Haitians to resist foreign military intervention in the country and uphold what he portrays as the late president's legacy of fighting Haiti's corrupt oligarchs. He has tattoos representing both men.

⁸⁴ See Crisis Group Report, *Locked in Transition: Politics and Violence in Haiti*, op. cit., p. 16.

Viv Ansanm has sought to capitalise on anti-government sentiment by emphasising the struggle between “the people from below” and “the people from above” while cloaking itself in nationalist garb.⁸⁵ It is no coincidence that Chérizier announced the creation of Viv Ansanm on 18 August 2023, during a demonstration organised by gangs in support of Haitian farmers building an irrigation canal on the Massacre River, which runs along the Haitian-Dominican border. While the project aims to divert water for farmland increasingly affected by drought, the site is also one of great historical significance: in 1937, Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo ordered a massacre of thousands of Haitians, whose bodies were dumped in the river. Dominican President Luis Abinader vigorously protested the dam’s construction, temporarily closing every border with Haiti to halt it; the project nonetheless has enormous popular support among Haitians.⁸⁶

Gang leaders portray those in power as the real gangsters, frequently pointing to alleged instances of government corruption to buttress their case.⁸⁷ They are also careful never to refer to their organisations as gangs, instead calling them armed groups, or *nèg ak zam* (“men with weapons” in Haitian Creole). Crime bosses claim that Haitian elites – who were the first to arm and finance gangs – have used them for their own purposes. They argue that these elites are the public’s true enemies. With a view to coming across as more honest and approachable, several prominent Viv Ansanm leaders who had previously avoided public appearances or always covered their faces with balaclavas have begun to record videos without masks.⁸⁸

Gangs have also sought to speak directly to Haitians, building a network of influencers who spread their message on social media while also intimidating journalists who criticise them.⁸⁹ Until late 2024,

⁸⁵ “Today, people’s eyes are open. ... They divide us below so they can rule from above”. “Uncaptured Media: How Post-au-Prince’s warring neighbourhoods united: Jimmy ‘Barbecue’ Chérizier and Toto Alexandre”, video, YouTube, 14 March 2024.

⁸⁶ Farmers in the north east started digging the canal in August 2023. Jacqueline Charles, “In New York visit, the Dominican Republic’s president defends border closure with Haiti”, *Miami Herald*, 19 September 2023; Rolph Louis-Jeune and Jean Feguens Regala, “Kanal la Pap Kanpe”, one of the most significant social movements in Haiti”, *Ayibopost*, 27 November 2023.

⁸⁷ Chérizier often draws attention to alleged corruption cases involving government officials. He has described the members of the Transitional Presidential Council as “nine thieves, nine gang leaders, nine looters”. See, for example, “Barbecue, Lanmò, Jeff Gwo lwa, yo fè Gwo deklarasyon Se fòs la yap tant”, video, YouTube, 10 May 2024.

⁸⁸ Kempès Sanon, leader of the Bel-Air gang, and Christ-Roi Chéry, leader of the Ti Bwa gang, have been appearing in videos posted on social media without balaclavas covering their faces since August.

⁸⁹ Chérizier says he remains committed to “making a video every day ... to help people ... understand the vicious journalists, the greedy journalists, the arrogant journalists who feel all-powerful because they have human rights organisations

gangs were regularly hosting live streams attracting thousands of viewers. But, as platform administrators caught on to them and banned their accounts, they are now mostly relying on Chérizier's nearly daily videos, in which he comments on political affairs, issues threats to adversaries and frequently acknowledges mistakes made by the gangs.⁹⁰

Criminal groups have also sought to gain the favour of local communities by circulating videos on social media showing themselves distributing money to children, giving gifts on occasions such as Mother's Day or Christmas, installing electrical lines in public areas or providing families with school supplies.⁹¹ Recently, they have held marches in an bid to demonstrate broad public support for their fight with the state (notably, a large number of participants are masked).⁹² The marchers hold aloft banners with identical handwriting, bearing slogans such as "Down with corrupt politicians" and "Izo does no harm to people in the neighbourhood".⁹³

Chérizier announced that Viv Ansanm had created a political party on the 221st anniversary of Haiti's independence.⁹⁴ Though it has yet to take the steps needed to register formally, Chérizier now ends all his statements by saying he is the spokesperson for the Viv Ansanm political party.

behind them, who feed us false information, who lie to us". Post on TikTok by @infotou9, 30 July 2025. This account is one of several that shares Viv Ansanm videos. Pierre-Richard Luxama, Dánica Coto and Evens Sanon, "Journalists in Haiti defy bullets and censorship to cover unprecedented violence", Associated Press, 2 April 2025.

⁹⁰ Until 2024, Chérizier's accounts on TikTok were easily traceable, but his content is now being posted online by accounts presenting themselves as media outlets, such as @NouvelLakay509, @nouveltou9 and @infotou9. These posts are then shared by accounts such as @pot.pawol.geto.a ("the spokesperson of the ghetto" in Haitian Creole) or @MissDangerous1804 (a reference to Haiti's independence in 1804).

⁹¹ In early October, accounts seemingly linked to gangs posted videos showing leaders such as alias Mikanor distributing envelopes of cash and kits for the start of the school year. See, for example, post on TikTok, @infotou9, 6 October 2025.

⁹² Three such demonstrations were held in June and July in the gang-controlled territories of Fontamara, Delmas and Source Matelas.

⁹³ Photographs published on TikTok, @infotou9, 20 June and 7 July 2025.

⁹⁴ In this statement, Chérizier declared that the gang coalition rejects all political agreements made in Haiti since the assassination of President Moïse. He called for establishing a new government in accordance with the 1987 constitution, with an executive led by a judge from the Court de Cassation. The original video announcing creation of the political party is no longer available online. Another video in which he talks about the party is "Viv Ansanm tounen Pati Politik, yo gentan gen reprezantan nan chak deputman", video posted to Facebook, 14 January 2025.

B. *Dialogue and the Pursuit of Amnesty*

Viv Ansanm has continuously pressed for dialogue with Haiti's political leaders, seemingly with the hope of obtaining a stake in the government that entails full amnesty for its members.⁹⁵ Gangs refused to recognise the transitional government formed in early 2024, arguing that they had been excluded from the talks that set it up.⁹⁶ As the gangs sought a voice in decisions about the country's future, Chérizier suggested in a press conference that Haitians would have to learn to forgive one another for past wrongs, in effect advocating for amnesty for gang members.⁹⁷ Sources tell Crisis Group that the groups are hoping that a new government will include politicians willing to negotiate with them.⁹⁸

Viv Ansanm has repeatedly raised the possibility of negotiations, tying itself to political figures sympathetic to this demand. The politician most openly aligned with gangs is Guy Philippe, a former police commander with a chequered history: after staging a coup in 2004, he was extradited to the U.S. in 2017 for money laundering and served six years in a federal prison before being deported to Haiti in 2023.⁹⁹ The following year, Philippe proposed creating a three-member presidential council that he would lead. He also advocated amnesty for gangs and the elites associated with them.¹⁰⁰

Perhaps the closest Haiti has come to formal talks with gangs was during the administration of former Prime Minister Garry Conille. After his appointment on 28 May 2024, Viv Ansanm's spokesperson suggested that Conille could change the course of history by pacifying the

⁹⁵ Gang leaders hardly ever acknowledge the true intentions behind their calls for dialogue. An exception occurred when gang leader Vitelhomme Innocent, in his first interview with an international media outlet, while Viv Ansanm was paralysing the capital, acknowledged that the gangs were demanding amnesty under a future government. Caitlin Steven Hu, David Culver and Evelio Contreras, "Gangs forced out Haiti's government. This FBI 'most wanted' gang leader claims they're liberating the country", CNN, 30 April 2024.

⁹⁶ "Haiti gang leader will consider ceasefire but warns foreign forces will be treated as 'invaders'", Sky News, 29 March 2024.

⁹⁷ "Sieso News: Jimmy Cherizier alias Barbecue fè konnen premye minis Ariel Henry", video, YouTube, 29 February 2024.

⁹⁸ Crisis Group telephone interviews, March 2025.

⁹⁹ James Wagner, "Return to Haiti of a coup leader raises concerns of more turmoil", *The New York Times*, 30 November 2023; video posted on TikTok, @wenky.bens.233, 12 November 2024.

¹⁰⁰ At the time, Philippe did not acknowledge ties with Viv Ansanm, instead saying some of the gangs "like my speech, and some want to follow me". Stephen Eisenhammer, "Haiti ex-coup leader Guy Philippe demands PM resign, wants presidency", Reuters, 8 March 2024. One of his associates, however, stated on public radio that the gangs were not "bandits" but rather "rebels" aiming to liberate the country. He said Philippe was at the head of the revolution. "Radio Television Caraïbe: Pòt pawò Revèy Ayiti, Jean Hilaire Lundi mande popilasyon an mobilize nan tout peyi a", video, YouTube, 25 July 2024.

country through dialogue.¹⁰¹ The next day, as he welcomed the first Kenyan contingent deployed as part of the multinational force, Conille responded with an ambiguous statement that did not foreclose the prospect of negotiations: “First lay down your arms, recognise the authority of the state and then we’ll see where we go from there”.¹⁰²

Over the next few weeks, both the government and armed groups appeared willing to scale down hostilities and sent signals that direct talks were possible. Chérizier suggested publicly that the prime minister would be wise to start his term by doing something to the public’s benefit, such as cleaning up the piles of trash littering the lower Delmas area of the capital.¹⁰³ Soon thereafter, the politician Magalie Habitant (who was later arrested for reported ties to leaders of Viv Ansanm) began leading a street-cleaning campaign.¹⁰⁴ The work proceeded without incident, in stark contrast to clashes with the security forces that had paralysed the same area a few weeks earlier – a sign that gangs welcomed it. As the cleanup began, Chérizier read a statement addressed to Conille: “We have decided to publicly announce our strategy to lay down our arms, facilitate national dialogue and put an end to the mafia’s war”.¹⁰⁵

If this “garbage diplomacy” seemed intended to set the stage for dialogue, it came to an abrupt end when the presidential council decided to sack Prime Minister Conille and replace him with Alix Didier Fils-Aimé in November 2024.¹⁰⁶ In response, the gangs, which had scaled back their attacks with a view to paving the way for talks, said they

¹⁰¹ Jean Daniel Sénat, “Jimmy Chérizier dit Barbecue veut dialoguer”, *Le Nouveliste*, 24 June 2024.

¹⁰² “Échos de la Conférence de Presse de Dr Garry Conille et Dr Monica Juma”, video, YouTube, 25 July 2024.

¹⁰³ In a video posted online, Chérizier stated that Prime Minister Conille could engage in dialogue with the gangs to pacify the country, decommission weapons, hold elections and set the nation on the path to development. Chérizier added that the gangs were in “observation mode”, waiting for signals from the government, such as the clean-up campaign in lower Delmas. Video posted to TikTok, @tanishadar-linevlog2, 24 June 2024.

¹⁰⁴ Habitant acknowledged communicating with at least six major Viv Ansanm gang leaders, and the police have evidence that she brokered an agreement with the director of the social assistance government agency Caisse d’Assistance Sociale to provide 350,000 Haitian gourdes (about \$2,670) to the gangs for purchasing ammunition. Juhakenson Blaise, “Haitian ex-lawmaker and former director arrested in ongoing gang crisis investigation”, *The Haitian Times*, 14 January 2025. Confidential report, Direction Centrale de la Police Judiciaire, Bureau des Affaires Criminelles, 27 March 2025. On file with Crisis Group.

¹⁰⁵ “Bon Zen TV: Jimmy Chérizier Alyas Babekyou mande dyalog Premye minis Garry Conille epi CP an”, video, YouTube, 5 July 2024.

¹⁰⁶ Jamie Whitehead, “Haiti’s prime minister ousted after six months”, BBC, 10 November 2024.

would resume their anti-government offensive.¹⁰⁷ Viv Ansanm has since battled to expand the territory under its control and claimed once again that its main goal is to overthrow the government.¹⁰⁸

That said, Viv Ansanm continues to manifest its willingness to negotiate peace in exchange for an amnesty. In July 2024, the group persuaded Ti Gabriel to demolish over a dozen brick and concrete walls that had been erected across Cité Soleil over the previous four years to separate rival gang domains.¹⁰⁹ On this occasion, Chérizier emphasised that the gangs were pursuing peace independently of politicians. One year later, Viv Ansanm withdrew from several neighbourhoods in the capital – including Solino, Nazon and parts of Delmas – that they had taken by force in late 2024, calling upon residents to return to their homes. Again, they presented this move as evidence of their readiness to make peace directly with local communities, rather than through politicians.¹¹⁰

With an eye to reviving prospects for full negotiations that could lead to an amnesty, Viv Ansanm in August sent a letter to the recently appointed special representative for the UN Secretary-General in Haiti, Carlos Ruiz Massieu. In it, the gang coalition highlighted Ruiz Massieu's experience as head of the UN Verification Mission in Colombia, where he oversaw the implementation of the peace agreement with the guerrilla Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). The letter stressed that Haiti's conflict could be resolved only through

¹⁰⁷ "Echo News: BBQ anonse gwo kouri nan peyi a jodi Dimanch 10 Novanm 2024 la", video, YouTube, 10 November 2025. Jean Rebel Dorcénat, a former member of the National Commission for Disarmament, Dismantlement and Reintegration, later claimed that before Conille's replacement, plans were in place to reopen the road controlled by gangs that links the capital to Haiti's north. The idea was to hold a marathon along the road on 18 November 2024. Jonasson Odigène, "Le gouvernement Conille avait prévu d'ouvrir la route nationale # 1, révèle Jean Rebel Dorcénat", *Le Nouvelliste*, 27 November 2024.

¹⁰⁸ "Echo News: Dife pete nan Primati! Babekyou pran tèt CPT a?" video, YouTube, 4 April 2025.

¹⁰⁹ These walls are known in Haiti as VAR – in reference to the Video Assistant Referee system used to monitor refereeing decisions in football matches – and were used to prevent movement from one territory to another. Snipers were often positioned along the walls to shoot at anyone approaching, inspiring the comparison with all-seeing virtual refereeing systems. The destruction of these structures enabled roads to reopen, improving access to essential goods for residents of areas that had been cut off by frequent inter-gang clashes. Jean Daniel Sénat, "Cité Soleil : des chefs de gangs font la paix, une foule en liesse dans les rues", *Le Nouvelliste*, 24 July 2024.

¹¹⁰ Video posted to TikTok, @infotou9, 25 August 2025. Few people have gone back to the area, as nearly all its houses have been looted, partly burned or destroyed. The police urged the population not to return to these neighbourhoods before the government established a relocation plan, warning that the gangs would use civilians as human shields. Crisis Group telephone interviews, former Solino residents, August-September 2025. Erens Sanon and Dánica Coto, "Haitians yearn for home as gangs welcome them and police warn it's too dangerous", Associated Press, 16 September 2025.

dialogue, making clear that unification of gangs under the aegis of Viv Ansanm is aimed at compelling the authorities to negotiate. “Haiti will be a shared paradise or a common hell”, it said.¹¹¹ The letter did not specify what demands gangs might pursue in eventual discussions with authorities.

Gangs are acutely aware that the country’s political instability has created opportunities to infiltrate Haitian governing institutions. The mandate of the Transitional Presidential Council ends on 7 February 2026 and negotiations to replace its members are under way. It is likely that Viv Ansanm will try to exploit this transition to ensure that individuals willing to ally with them are included in whatever new political arrangement emerges.

¹¹¹ “Vérité historique et réflexion stratégique sur la crise haïtienne”, letter from Parti Politique Viv Ansanm, 19 August 2025.

V. The Fightback

Haiti's national police and its newly reconstituted army have proven incapable of checking the gangs' rising power, while the UN-blessed multinational security mission has never received all the funds or staff it needs to function properly. Desperate to restore security, the prime minister appealed to private military companies to support a task force that has ratcheted up the firepower used to fight gangs, fuelling concern about collateral harm on civilians. Haiti's foreign partners, led by the U.S., have in turn approved the creation of a more robust military force for deployment in the country, supposedly drawing on a more reliable flow of financing.

A. *New Forms of Combat*

Haiti's authorities have started to meet the threats posed by gangs with a range of new policing tactics and assets. One of the most notable has been the use of armed drones to target gangs in their strongholds. The UN human rights office reported in June that drone strikes in the previous three months had injured at least 223 people – including gang leaders alias Izo and Ti Lapli – and killed over 236, six of whom were civilians.¹¹² In the same period, the Haitian police reportedly killed 814 people and injured 449 others, including 189 civilians.¹¹³

Drone strikes are handled by a task force including Haitian law enforcement officers and personnel from a private security company owned by Blackwater founder Erik Prince.¹¹⁴ Created by Prime Minister Alix Didier Fils-Aimé, who had grown dissatisfied with police performance under the leadership of Normil Rameau, the task force first used drones to hit gang redoubts that are difficult to reach by other means.¹¹⁵ While this tactic instilled fear among the gangs, authorities remained unable to regain territorial control, partly because of a lack

¹¹² "Quarterly Report on the Human Rights Situation in Haiti, April-June 2025", OHCHR/BINUH, June 2025, p. 13. In September, an explosive drone was launched at a park in the capital's Simon Pelé neighbourhood, where the local gang leader Djouma was distributing gifts to children. The strike killed eleven minors, some as young as two, while its target remained unharmed. Frances Robles, "Drone strike in Haiti kills 8 children at a birthday party", *The New York Times*, 23 September 2025.

¹¹³ "Quarterly Report on the Human Rights Situation in Haiti, April-June 2025", op. cit., p. 12.

¹¹⁴ David C. Adams, Frances Robles and Mark Mazzetti, "A desperate Haiti turns to Erik Prince, Trump ally, in fight against gangs", *The New York Times*, 28 May 2025.

¹¹⁵ A high-ranking Haitian official told Crisis Group that the prime minister wanted to fire Rameau but could not, because he had support among the presidential councillors. Crisis Group interview, Port-au-Prince, 1 April 2025. See also tweet by Primate de la République d'Haïti, @PrimatureHT, 12:47pm, 1 March 2025.

of coordination between the task force and the police.¹¹⁶ In August, Rameau was removed, and under the new chief of police, Vladimir Paraison, the two bodies have started to collaborate. In their first fully coordinated operation, Haitian police and soldiers, officers from the Kenyan-led mission and private contractors operating explosive drones retook the telecommunications hub known as Teleco in Kenscoff, south of Port-au-Prince.¹¹⁷

Deploying drones to target gang members outside of combat settings has stirred debate in Haiti and beyond, with human rights advocates questioning the legality of using lethal force when individual lives are not immediately at stake.¹¹⁸ So far, however, Canadian officials have been the only international donor representatives to echo these concerns.¹¹⁹ Meanwhile, Haitian government officials have pointed to the severity of the threat posed by Viv Ansanm to justify the use of drones.¹²⁰

The Haitian armed forces have also been mobilised as part of the transitional government's campaign. Dissolved in 1995 but brought back by President Moïse in 2017, the army now regularly supports the police in offensives against the gangs.¹²¹ But the army remains ill

¹¹⁶ A source indicated that the first drone strikes were a last resort after gangs seized a large part of the Delmas commune in the capital and security forces appeared unable to halt their advance upon the offices of the presidential council and the prime minister in Pétion-Ville. Crisis Group interview, Haitian government official, Port-au-Prince, 1 April 2025.

¹¹⁷ Charles, "Haiti police lead daring raid to retake key comms hub. It's a rare win in war on gangs", op. cit.

¹¹⁸ William O'Neill, a UN expert on human rights in Haiti, has said no armed conflict has been declared in the country, limiting how law enforcement agencies are legally allowed to use lethal force. "The Wild West": Desperation is rampant in Haiti as gangs, vigilantes spread", UN News, 15 August 2025.

¹¹⁹ A Canadian police spokesperson stated in June that drone strikes carried out by the prime minister's task force "are in violation of Haiti's domestic criminal law and international human rights law", adding that the task force has "no legal authorities". Frances Robles, "Haiti is using drones to fight gangs. Here's why that's likely to be illegal", *The New York Times*, 17 June 2025.

¹²⁰ Haiti's politicians have emphasised the conflict's severity to defend the use of drones. "If you don't call that a war, I don't know what it is", Fritz Jean, a member of the Transitional Presidential Council, said in July. Joe Daniels, "Drones are vital to fight Haiti's gangs, says interim leader", *Financial Times*, 13 July 2025.

¹²¹ The Haitian army was disbanded following the coup d'état led by General Raoul Cédras that ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in 1991. Moïse reinstated the army in 2017, but foreign partners, particularly the U.S., were opposed to granting it a prominent role. As a result, the nascent force was tasked at first with limited duties such as securing vital infrastructure. After soldiers stationed inside the Port-au-Prince airport helped thwart Viv Ansanm's attempt to take over the site in 2024, however, opposition to the reconstituted army has receded. Crisis Group interview, senior military officer, Port-au-Prince, 23 October 2024. See also Andres Martinez Casares and Joseph Guyler Delva, "Haitian army set to make controversial return after two decades", Reuters, 18 November 2017; and Jacqueline Charles, "Haiti has deployed its army; troops joined police to push back gang takeover of airport", *Miami Herald*, 6 March 2024.

equipped and poorly trained, and its 900 troops are focused on static tasks, such as securing key sites and protecting areas retaken by the Haitian police and the multinational mission.¹²² High-ranking army officers say the force is composed mostly of engineers, doctors and agronomists, many of them ill-suited for warfare. Officers expressed hope that training will help build specialised infantry units able to engage gangs in combat.¹²³ Colombia, France and Mexico are now running training programs for Haitian soldiers.¹²⁴

B. A Reinforced Foreign Mission

In September, two days before the mandate of the Kenyan-led Multi-national Security Support mission (MSS) was to end, the UN Security Council approved a new operation – the Gang Suppression Force, or GSF.¹²⁵ A brainchild of the Trump administration, the resolution drafted by the U.S. and Panama mandated the deployment of up to 5,500 military personnel and 50 civilians to “neutralise, isolate and deter” Haiti’s gangs.¹²⁶ It also created a new ad hoc diplomatic group, the Standing Group of Partners, to oversee the operation.

The thinking behind the Security Council resolution is that a larger and more militarily oriented force, supported by more predictable funding, can stabilise the country in ways that the existing mission has failed to do.¹²⁷ The UN Trust Fund for the MSS received only about

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Crisis Group interview, Port-au-Prince, 9 April 2025.

¹²⁴ Michael Rios, “Haití envía militares a México para entrenamiento mientras persiste la violencia de pandillas”, CNN, 25 July 2025; “Colombia entrenará Fuerzas Militares y de Policía de Haití”, press release, Presidencia de la República (Colombia), 2 August 2025; Belly-Dave Bélizaire, “Un nouveau contingent de 25 soldats des FAD'H part en Martinique pour une formation”, *Vant Bèf Info*, 14 September 2025.

¹²⁵ “Haiti: New ‘suppression force’ for Haiti amid gang violence,” UN News, 30 September 2025.

¹²⁶ “Resolution 2793”, UNSC S/RES/2794, 30 September 2025, para 1(a).

¹²⁷ The U.S. unveiled its plans for the GSF in late August, when it launched an aggressive diplomatic campaign on behalf of the proposal. Secretary of State Marco Rubio and the U.S. chargé d’affaires in Haiti, Henry Wooster, spent much of the UN General Assembly’s high-level week in September rallying support. The Haitian transitional government, CARICOM, the 32 active Organization of American States (OAS) members and the G7 all signed on. China, Russia and Pakistan abstained from the vote, citing concerns ranging from the authorisation of lethal force to unclear accountability structures and the lack of firm commitments for troops and voluntary funding. The Russian representative explained that his government had decided against vetoing the resolution after Haitian authorities and neighbouring states asked them not to block it. Along with China, Russia also noted that the U.S. was pressing member states to share the financial burden for the new force despite failing to meet its own financial obligations for the UN budget. UN Security Council, 80th year: 10009th meeting, S/PV.10009, 30 September 2025. “Haiti: Vote on a Draft Resolution Authorising a ‘Gang Suppression Force’ and a UN Support Office”, Security Council Report, 30 September 2025. Crisis Group interviews, UN diplomats, September 2025.

\$113 million, short of what it needed to cover annual costs.¹²⁸ Without more money for additional troops or new equipment, the MSS could not launch counter-offensives, hold what ground it had cleared or patrol far beyond its base.¹²⁹

On paper, the new force represents a major departure from the MSS. It is designed to be a military-led offensive operation, not a police mission, and will be entitled to act independently from Haitian authorities. Furthermore, its supporters argue that since the force will be deployed across a larger part of the country, it will deal with a wider range of threats, including drug trafficking and illicit weapons.¹³⁰

But for this force to work, UN-funded assistance will be crucial. The scheme calls for the creation of a dedicated Support Office for Haiti based in Port-au-Prince, which must be operational by April 2026 according to the Security Council resolution. The office will cover the mission's fuel, food, water, accommodation, medical services, operational infrastructure and strategic communications, as well as medical evacuation for Haitian officers participating in joint operations with the foreign force.¹³¹ It will also reimburse troop-contributing countries for the lethal equipment they provide. The Council's decision to fund part of the operations from the UN's peacekeeping budget will reassure possible troop-contributing countries and bring considerable financial relief to the U.S., the main funder of the MSS. That said, with President Trump withholding funding for the UN peacekeeping budget, the world organisation is itself under huge fiscal strain.¹³²

A host of questions have been left pending about how the GSF will operate, not least regarding which countries will contribute troops. At the time of writing, no country has volunteered to lead the mission, though the Standing Group of Partners – which includes The Bahamas, Canada, El Salvador, Guatemala, Jamaica, Kenya and the U.S. – are expected to mobilise troops and funds for the mission, as well as appoint its civilian and uniformed leadership.¹³³ The Trump administration has also pressed the Organization of American States (OAS) to

¹²⁸ Sarah Morland and Daphne Psaledakis, "US funding for Haiti mission in doubt if UN resolution rejected, official says," Reuters, 24 September 2025.

¹²⁹ The Kenyan government explained in a letter to the Security Council that, due to lack of resources, the mission had been able to deploy only 991 of the 2,500 expected personnel, who had less than 30 per cent of the intended equipment. "Note verbale dated 20 June 2025 from the Permanent Mission of Kenya to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council", UNSC S/2025/402, 20 June 2025.

¹³⁰ Crisis Group telephone interview, U.S. official, 10 October 2025.

¹³¹ "Resolution 2793", op. cit.

¹³² Crisis Group Special Briefing N°13, *Ten Challenges for the UN in 2025-2026*, 9 September 2025. See also Colum Lynch, "Trump administration to unlock hundreds of millions for UN peacekeeping", Devex, 6 October 2025.

¹³³ Crisis Group telephone interview, 30 September 2025.

assume a more prominent role in galvanising regional support.¹³⁴ OAS Secretary General Albert Ramdin has developed a roadmap to mobilise support for the Gang Suppression Force, including an action plan to address both the country's urgent needs and long-term priorities.¹³⁵

Diplomats and officials at the UN suggest that the UN-backed support office could require \$350-500 million annually, while U.S. officials have indicated that the combined costs of the GSF and support office might come close to \$1 billion per year.¹³⁶ This calculation does not include the costs associated with personnel, which would add approximately \$100 million per year, and would be funded through voluntary contributions via the UN trust fund.¹³⁷ Without these funds, it is thought unlikely that the new mission could accomplish its goals. Ramdin, for his part, has acknowledged that the greatest challenge facing his organisation's comprehensive plan for Haiti is securing the necessary funding.¹³⁸

Accountability concerns also abound. The force will need personnel with expertise in offensive urban operations, as most gangs are entrenched in densely populated slums. Because of the likelihood that civilians will be used as human shields during combat, the UN will need to provide close oversight to prevent human rights violations.

C. *Vigilante Justice*

With little by way of state-assured public safety, many Haitians have organised vigilante groups to defend their communities. In April 2023, residents of the capital's Canapé-Vert neighbourhood lynched over a dozen suspected gang members. The so-called Bwa Kale movement, in which self-defence groups sprung up around the country, ensued.¹³⁹

¹³⁴ Dánica Coto, "Organization of American States under pressure from the US to help quell gang violence in Haiti," Associated Press, 22 May 2025.

¹³⁵ The roadmap aims to coordinate international initiatives to support the Haitian authorities in five areas: restoring security, building political consensus, organising elections, improving the delivery of humanitarian assistance and promoting sustainable economic development. Its estimated total cost is \$2.6 billion, of which \$1.336 billion is allocated to security. "OAS Secretary General Presents Roadmap for Stability and Peace in Haiti," press release, OAS, 20 August 2025.

¹³⁶ Crisis Group interviews, New York, September 2025.

¹³⁷ Based on two different rates (\$828 per person per month, the African Union rate for AUSSOM, its mission in Somalia) and \$1,428 per person per month (the UN peacekeeping rate).

¹³⁸ The OAS plans to convene a donors' conference, jointly with the Inter-American Development Bank, to help mobilise the substantial resources required for this plan. Roberson Alphonse, "Quand Albert Ramdin évoque la feuille de route pour la stabilité et la paix en Haïti", *Le Nouvelliste*, 21 October 2025.

¹³⁹ On 24 April 2023, amid rumours of an imminent large-scale gang offensive in Port-au-Prince, police intercepted a minibus passing through Canapé-Vert carrying thirteen suspected gang members and weapons. Residents lynched the passengers, and footage of the incident went viral on social media. A wave of lynchings of sus-

In Port-au-Prince, these brigades, as they are known in Haiti, erected barricades and set up checkpoints on access roads to areas they control.¹⁴⁰ Given the scarcity of security personnel outside the capital, vigilante brigades have played a prominent role in curbing gang expansion. Gangs, in turn, have mounted brutal offensives against towns and villages where brigades operate, targeting civilians they believe to be resisting their presence.¹⁴¹

Vigilante brigades have grown stronger over the past two years, acquiring high-powered firearms and reinforcing their internal organisation and coordination with other self-defence groups. Police officers claim that vigilantes are sometimes more effective than the state in countering gangs, as they have intimate knowledge of the territories they protect and are able to maintain a continuous presence in their localities.¹⁴² Local human rights defenders nevertheless warn that some armed brigades' checkpoint inspections are increasingly aggressive. There have been reports of brigade members assaulting – and, in some cases, even killing – people who cannot justify being in a particular area. People who do not carry identification or who are suspected of being gang members based on their physical appearance, such as dreadlocks or tattoos, have found themselves in the crosshairs.¹⁴³

Rising tensions with the Canapé-Vert brigade – currently one of the most powerful in the capital – have also shown that the self-defence groups' growing strength poses a threat to the authorities. The brigade's leader, Samuel Joasil – known as Komandan Samuel – organ-

pected gang members followed, perpetrated by self-defence groups as well as unorganised mobs. See Diego Da Rin, "Haitians Turn to Mob Justice as the Gang Threat Festers", Crisis Group Commentary, 3 July 2023.

¹⁴⁰ For more about vigilante brigades in the capital, see Crisis Group Report, *Locked in Transition: Politics and Violence in Haiti*, op. cit., p. 19.

¹⁴¹ Communities along National Route 1, which links the capital to the country's north, have suffered some of the most savage attacks, including the killing of more than 100 residents in Source-Matelas by the Village de Dieu and Canaan gangs in April 2023, and the October 2024 massacre in Pont-Sondé carried out by Gran Grif. In September, over 40 people were massacred in the town of Labodrie after a self-defence group was involved in the death of a lieutenant of a Cabaret-based gang. In the Centre department, clashes between gangs and vigilante brigades escalated in 2025. After police, with the help of a local brigade, seized high-calibre weapons and over 10,000 rounds of ammunition, Viv Ansam launched a major offensive that allowed the gang coalition to firm up its foothold in the region. The self-defence group Back-up Feray has now set up roadblocks in that area, slowing down the illegal flow of arms entering Port-au-Prince. "Situation de terreur en Haïti, les chiffres noirs du gouvernement d'Ariel Henry", Foundasyon Jeklere, 2 May 2022, pp. 13-14; Jonasson Odigène, "Arcahaie respire après les attaques, la PNH saluée", *Le Nouvelliste*, 31 October 2024; "Importante saisie de munitions à Mirebalais", *Haïti Libre*, 10 March 2025. See also "Intensification of Criminal Violence in Lower Artibonite, the Centre department and Regions Located East of the Metropolitan Area of Port-au-Prince", BINUH/OHCHR, July 2025.

¹⁴² John Smith Justin, "Défense contre les attaques armées: une analyse sur les brigades de vigilance", *Le Nouvelliste*, 26 June 2025.

¹⁴³ Crisis Group interview, Port-au-Prince, 28 March 2025.

ised several protests between late March and early April, the strongest anti-government movement the transitional authorities have faced.¹⁴⁴ Thousands marched toward the offices of the presidential council and the prime minister, carrying sticks, stones, machetes and firearms, denouncing what they saw as senior officials' inaction in addressing gang violence and demanding their resignation.¹⁴⁵

D. Tightening Sanctions

The U.S., the European Union and the UN have turned to sanctions as a way to punish individuals and curtail financial support for the gangs, to mixed effect. In May, the U.S. State Department designated the Viv Ansanm coalition and the Gran Grif gang (which is part of Viv Ansanm) as foreign terrorist organisations, while the Office of Foreign Assets Control included them in its list of specially designated global terrorists.¹⁴⁶ The State Department claimed that the organisations' goal is to create a "gang-controlled state where illicit trafficking and other criminal activities operate freely".¹⁴⁷

U.S. officials noted that the designation of these gangs as terrorists has enhanced their ability to pursue individuals in the U.S. who provide Haitian criminals with material support, stressing that "the era of impunity is over".¹⁴⁸ The Trump administration also arrested two prominent Haitian businessmen, Pierre Réginald Boulos and Dimitri Vorbe. Boulos and Vorbe, who had not previously been sanctioned, were detained in Miami in July on multiple charges, including supporting gangs in Haiti. In addition, Bazile Richardson, a U.S. citizen, was indicted for arranging money transfers from members of the Haitian diaspora to

¹⁴⁴ Arnold Junior Pierre, "Des milliers de manifestants réclament des mesures contre les gangs, affrontements à Bourdon", *Gazette Haïti*, 19 March 2025; Evens Sanon, "Gunfire as thousands protest in Haiti to denounce a surge in gang violence", Associated Press, 2 April 2025.

¹⁴⁵ These demonstrations took place while Viv Ansanm was carrying out offensives on multiple fronts, including in the Centre department and Kenscoff, which overlooks the upscale districts of Pétion-Ville, where gangs were trying to seize the last remaining access route to the capital not yet under their control. With security forces stretched thin, people in Port-au-Prince feared an imminent takeover of the areas still beyond the gangs' reach.

¹⁴⁶ "Terrorist Designations of Viv Ansanm and Gran Grif", press release, U.S. Department of State, 2 May 2025. "DOS Designates Two Haitian Groups as Foreign Terrorist Organizations and Specially Designated Global Terrorists", American Immigration Lawyers Association, 5 May 2025.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. The designation came after a group of Haitian politicians asked that Washington make this move. "Haïti: Conseil présidentiel de transition, crise et sortie de crise. Proposition de trois parties prenantes", Accord 21 Décembre, Collectif 30 Janvier and Les Engagés pour le Développement, 8 January 2025.

¹⁴⁸ See tweet by Christopher Landau, U.S. deputy secretary of state, @Deputy SecState, 5:27pm, 3 May 2025; and tweet by U.S. Embassy in Haiti, @USEmbassy Haiti, 12:57pm, 8 May 2025.

Chérizier.¹⁴⁹ The U.S. State Department has also offered a reward of up to \$5 million for information leading to Chérizier's arrest.¹⁵⁰

Well before these designations, the U.S. and Canada had targeted with sanctions members of the Haitian elite involved with gangs, including former President Michel Martelly and two former prime ministers.¹⁵¹ The UN Security Council, for its part, adopted a resolution in October 2022 establishing sanctions on Haiti, while the EU set up its own restrictions a month later. The EU has since imposed travel bans on roughly a dozen designated gang leaders, freezing their assets as well, though these measures have little or no impact on individuals who have no bank accounts and do not travel.¹⁵² Besides crime bosses, UN Security Council members have agreed to impose sanctions on only two individuals who support gang activities.¹⁵³ In October, in negotiations to expand the UN Security Council sanctions list, Russia reportedly blocked the inclusion of Haitian politicians Rony Célestin and Youri Latortue, saying it did not back restrictions on political figures.¹⁵⁴

E. Exit Ramps for Minors

While most efforts to tackle gangs are rooted in the use of force, the transitional government has also taken steps to prevent recruitment

¹⁴⁹ The U.S. State Department determined that Boulos had “engaged in a campaign of violence and gang support that contributed to Haiti’s destabilization”, though it did not provide specifics on how he helped the gangs, which ones he aided or when he did so. “ICE arrests Haitian engaged in violence and destabilization of Haiti, in support of Department of State”, press release, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, 21 July 2025; Jacqueline Charles, “Prison or death awaits’: U.S. trucker accused of financing Haiti gang leader”, *Miami Herald*, 12 August 2025; “ICE arrests illegal alien from Haiti connected to criminal terrorist organizations”, press release, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, 25 September 2025.

¹⁵⁰ “Up to US\$ 5 Million Reward Offer for Information Leading to the Arrest and/or Conviction of Haitian Gang Leader of Foreign Terrorist Organization Viv Ansanm,” press release, U.S. Department of State, 12 August 2025.

¹⁵¹ “Treasury Sanctions Corrupt Haitian Politicians for Narcotics Trafficking”, press release, U.S. Treasury Department, 4 November 2022; Jacqueline Charles and Michael Wilner, “Canada sanctions former Haiti president Michel Martelly, two former prime ministers”, *Miami Herald*, 21 November 2022.

¹⁵² “Council Decision (CFSP) 2022/2319 of 25 November 2022 concerning restrictive measures in view of the situation in Haiti”, Council of the European Union, 25 November 2022; “Council Decision (CFSP) 2025/2442 of 1 December 2025 concerning restrictive measures in view of the situation in Haiti”, Council of the European Union, 1 December 2025.

¹⁵³ Prophane Victor, a former member of Haiti’s parliament, was sanctioned in September 2024 by the UN Security Council for helping establish and arm the Gran Grif gang. “Prophane Victor”, UN Security Council, 27 September 2024. Dimitri Herard, a former head of security at Haiti’s national palace, was sanctioned in October 2025 for collaborating with gangs and facilitating the trafficking of arms and ammunition. “Security Council 2653 Sanctions Committee Adds 2 Entries to Its Sanctions List”, UN News, 27 September 2024; “Resolution 2794”, UNSC S/RES/2794, 17 October 2025, p. 5.

¹⁵⁴ “Vote on a Draft Resolution Renewing the Sanctions Regime”, Security Council Report, 16 October 2025.

and provide safe exit ramps for minors already involved in gangs, as previously recommended by Crisis Group.¹⁵⁵ The existing program establishes transit centres (facilities designed to host minors who defect from gangs) that would allow a few hundred children to exit safely – a small proportion of the thousands of kids in gangs' ranks.¹⁵⁶ Additionally, an initiative to train women in community mediation is aimed at preventing gang child recruitment and supporting the reintegration of minors who leave these groups.¹⁵⁷ The UN political mission in Haiti, known as BINUH – in collaboration with other UN agencies, Haitian institutions and the French embassy – runs the program. It has already trained over 100 women.¹⁵⁸

Haitian authorities have not yet devised any program that would allow safe individual or collective desertion by gang members who are older than eighteen.¹⁵⁹ The National Commission for Disarmament, Dismantlement and Reintegration (CNDDR) – which should be in charge of disarmament programs and initiatives to encourage broader desertion – has been temporarily dissolved following concerns over a member's alleged gang links.¹⁶⁰ The government said it would appoint new members after consultations with civil society, but it had yet to do so at the time of writing.

¹⁵⁵ See Renata Segura and Diego Da Rin, "Haiti's Window of Opportunity: What It Will Take to Stop Gang Violence and Promote Stability", *Foreign Affairs*, 29 August 2024. "The Haitian Government and UNICEF launch the PREJEUNES programme to address the recruitment of children and youth by armed gangs", press release, UNICEF, 10 July 2025.

¹⁵⁶ UNICEF estimates that 30 to 50 per cent of gang members are minors. "Violence drives Haiti's children into armed groups; up to half of all members are now children", UNICEF, 31 May 2024. Estimates of the total number of gang members range from 12,000 to several tens of thousands.

¹⁵⁷ "United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti: Report of the Secretary-General", op. cit., p. 8.

¹⁵⁸ "100 femmes formées comme médiatrices communautaires", *Haiti Libre*, 28 July 2025.

¹⁵⁹ In June, OAS Secretary General Ramdin told an interviewer that the possibility of engaging with gangs to address Haiti's security crisis should be considered, a view shared by other Caribbean leaders, including Dominica's Prime Minister Roosevelt Skerrit. Skerrit has revealed that, as CARICOM chairman in the second half of 2023, he approached the Norwegian government about supporting discussions with gangs in Haiti and that he personally offered to take part in dialogue. A few days after Ramdin's interview, Haiti's presidential council posted a press release on X (since deleted) stating that Haitians had suffered for many years from the insecurity caused by gangs and could not condone negotiation with them. Jack Quinn, "New OAS secretary general eyes talks to solve Haiti's crisis", The Dialogue (blog), 9 June 2025; "GIS Dominica: PM Skerrit press conference", video, YouTube, 26 May 2025.

¹⁶⁰ Léon Kersivil and Daniel Zéphyr, "La nomination de Jean Rebel Dorcénat réputé 'proche de Viv Ansanm' à la CNDDR provoque sa dissolution", *Gazette Haïti*, 2 May 2025.

VI. Restoring Security

Even if the new international force receives the resources it needs, full victory over the gangs would require a prolonged campaign that could result in widespread civilian casualties. To minimise bloodshed and protect the many minors in the gangs' ranks, the Haitian government and their foreign partners should exploit the shift in the balance of force provided by a more robust security operation to open a negotiating channel with the criminal groups. Most Haitians have fervently opposed any dialogue with the gangs, afraid that it could lead to impunity for the perpetrators of numerous appalling crimes. Under the right conditions, however, the government and its foreign partners should explore ways to mitigate violence through dialogue. Ideally, they should provide incentives to gangs to demobilise while also guaranteeing they will not elude all liability for their acts.

A. *Retaking Territory*

The danger is high that gangs will go on the offensive between the phasing-out of the Kenya-led mission and the arrival of the Gang Suppression Force. For now, it remains unclear if the contingents deployed as part of the MSS will be fully integrated into the new mission and when personnel from the new force will land in Haiti.¹⁶¹ To prevent gangs from exploiting the hiatus, foreign states will need to pay the costs of the existing mission, ensuring that it remains operational until the new force is fully deployed.

Once a critical mass of the Gang Suppression Force is deployed in the country, the overriding priority for its commanders and Haiti's authorities should be to recover territory from gang control. Operations could begin in areas that are easy to reach and where the risk of civilian casualties is lowest. Besides limiting loss of life, focusing on these localities could help disrupt gang supply chains and cut off key sources of revenue. One feasible objective would be to regain control of National Roads 3 and 8, both of which run through sparsely populated regions. Retaking these roads would in all likelihood entail far less harm to civilians than close-quarter combat in the capital's slums, but it could cause serious damage to the gangs by getting rid of illegal road tolls and slowing the flow of arms to their urban strongholds. Armoured vessels could also swiftly resume patrolling Port-au-Prince Bay, where gangs use speedboats to loot passing ships, kidnap people and move fighters, weapons and drugs.¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ Rubio said in mid-November the U.S. hoped Kenyan troops would join the Gang Suppression Force, but Nairobi has not yet confirmed their participation. "Secretary of State Marco Rubio Remarks to the Press", U.S. Department of State, 12 November 2025.

¹⁶² Jerome Wendy Norestel, "Gangs are increasing attacks on boats off the coast of P-au-P", *Ayibopost*, 8 April 2024.

Security forces could also seek early on to dislodge gangs from areas where they are not yet deeply embedded. Reasserting control of Kenscoff, a suburb in the south of Port-au-Prince where gangs have recently expanded, would provide a major boost to Haitians' morale. Firm action against the gangs in the Centre department would prevent them from using their new positions there as rear bases for members fleeing the capital. Both international and local forces should also stand ready to counter simultaneous assaults across the capital, as Viv Ansanm has already shown it can fight on multiple fronts with the aim of wearing down its adversaries.

A priority for the force and the Haitian government throughout anti-gang offensives should be civilian protection. Achieving this goal will depend in large part on the strength of collaboration among the national police, the army, the new force and multinational mission. A crucial cog in these relations should be the National Security Council, which could serve as a stable liaison between the Haitian state and foreign security assistance. Though it was established by decree in December 2024, the council's members have yet to be appointed.¹⁶³ The government should make sure the council is properly staffed and functioning as soon as possible.

Once up and running, the National Security Council should establish stricter rules of engagement for the private military contractors now working in conjunction with the prime minister's task force, above all regarding the use of explosive drones. While these weapons can hit gang members inside hard-to-reach strongholds and help stymie their offensives, individuals authorising strikes must be mindful of the need to prevent civilian deaths. As Crisis Group has recommended in the past, Haitian police and foreign mission personnel should warn people in conflict-affected areas of forthcoming operations and help them leave their homes safely by creating corridors that allow residents to flee combat areas.¹⁶⁴

As the new security force has the freedom to conduct operations independently from Haitian forces, it is all the more important that each deployed combat unit have at least one person with basic proficiency in Haitian Creole to enable direct communication with local communities and the National Security Council.

¹⁶³ The council's appointment has been stalled due to disagreements over its composition and mandate, particularly whether it should be purely advisory or have decision-making authority. Some government officials have also expressed concern that the council could undermine their power. Crisis Group interviews, November 2024.

¹⁶⁴ See Crisis Group Briefing, *Haiti's Gangs: Can a Foreign Mission Break Their Stranglehold?*, op. cit.

B. Strengthening the Security Apparatus

Foreign capitals could help Haiti build a stronger public security system in other ways. To meet the goals of the national police recruitment campaign launched in October – which aims to incorporate 4,000 new officers by April 2027 – a new training facility should be set up outside the capital. The existing police academy in Port-au-Prince has limited capacity and is vulnerable to attack by gangs operating in its vicinity. Haiti's partners could support the creation of a new centre outside the capital and help recruit people for urban combat units and other parts of the state security apparatus, including the border police force, coast guard and anti-narcotics brigade, all of which are severely understaffed. These units are essential to staunch the flow of drugs and weapons that sustains gang activity.

Foreign donors should also fund the construction of a high-security prison where authorities could place gang members captured during security operations. (Many prisons were destroyed or severely damaged during the siege in early 2024.¹⁶⁵) The courts should also review cases of individuals held in prolonged pre-trial detention for minor offences in the few remaining prisons, all of which are outside Port-au-Prince. Their release would help free up space for the detention of gang members.

C. Demobilisation and Dialogue

Haitian authorities and their international counterparts should do more to create exit ramps for minors, a move that many Haitians are willing to entertain given that most children joined gangs to meet their most basic needs. Foreign capitals could help expand the existing program, known as PREJEUNES, which is setting up transit centres that could accommodate around 200 minors immediately after they leave gangs. In addition, the government – with the support of the private sector, local organisations and foreign donors – should develop job training programs for former gang members. The success of these efforts will depend on more effective coordination between national and international agencies working on safe exit pathways for minors. With that aim in mind, the Haitian government should appoint new members to re-establish the CNDDR, which has been temporarily disbanded.

A route to demobilisation should not be reserved solely for children. Though the U.S. has been clear that the new multinational force will corral any gang member it encounters, it would be sensible to exploit any early successes with a view to persuading gangs to negotiate their surrender.¹⁶⁶ Threats of incursions into the slums where the gangs

¹⁶⁵ "Armed gangs storm Haiti's main prison in latest escalation of violent conflict with police", PBS NewsHour, 3 March 2024.

¹⁶⁶ Crisis Group telephone interview, U.S. official, 10 October 2025.

have their hideouts, for example, could convince some members to lay down their weapons and open channels of communication with the authorities. Several gang leaders have already signalled that they would be willing to disarm and face legal proceedings.¹⁶⁷

Most Haitian officials have been reluctant to consider the idea of formal dialogue with gangs. As a member of the presidential council put it, the authorities “cannot negotiate [with gangs] while in a position of weakness”.¹⁶⁸ But if the new foreign force were to enable the security forces to gain the upper hand and gang desertions were to increase in number, conditions for fruitful talks might emerge. If that occurs, the government should stand ready to open channels of dialogue with gang leaders and propose a clear roadmap for progress, possibly with the support of a reconstituted CNDDR. Talks should address possible incentives for gang members in exchange for concrete advances in reducing violence against civilians. Sentence reductions, for example, could come as a reward for abandoning territory the gangs control, desisting from specific forms of violence against civilians – including sexual violence, kidnappings and extortions – or full confessions.¹⁶⁹ Eventually, this process could culminate in the group’s full demobilisation.

It is vital that any initiative to address gang violence through talks be able to count on the support of most of the population. To that end, the Haitian government would need to convince the public that dialogue would help ensure accountability, restore justice and prevent further violence – rather than guarantee impunity. Before and during any talks with gangs, the UN and local organisations should draw on the work of international experts on transitional justice to provide input into possible transitional justice arrangements. The Haitian state

¹⁶⁷ When U.S. authorities announced a \$5 million reward for information leading to Chérizier's arrest, he responded that he was ready to cooperate with the U.S. justice system. Gang leader Vitelhomme also stated that he would be willing to face justice, provided that members of the elite who have collaborated with the gangs are held accountable as well. Hu, Culver and Contreras, “Gangs forced out Haiti’s government. This FBI ‘most wanted’ gang leader claims they’re liberating the country”, *op. cit.*

¹⁶⁸ “France 24: Transition en Haïti: ‘On ne peut pas échouer’, assure Leslie Voltaire”, video, YouTube, 21 May 2024.

¹⁶⁹ Though Haiti’s judicial system is plagued by weaknesses, in April the Haitian government established two specialised judicial units to investigate, prosecute and adjudicate complex financial crimes and corruption, as well as mass crimes and sexual violence. With the support of the OHCHR and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, Haiti’s justice ministry is recruiting and training special prosecutors and judges to serve in these units. While much remains to be done to make these units fully operational, they could provide the most effective judicial avenue to ensuring accountability for the main perpetrators of crimes committed by gangs, as well as for those who supported these groups. “Publication du décret instituant deux nouveaux pôles judiciaires spécialisés dans le système pénal haïtien,” Haïti Press Network, 22 April 2025.

should also hold forums in the communities most affected by violence to explain how these processes would work.¹⁷⁰

Crime bosses, for their part, refuse to be the only ones held accountable for the spiral of violence. They demand that those who have supported them with funds and weapons are also brought to justice. Gangs might well be encouraged to cooperate with the authorities if more members of Haiti's elites with connections to the criminal underworld faced prosecution. Severing these links to power, meanwhile, should stand out as a main objective of negotiations with the gangs once they are under way.

D. Curbing Gang Influence in Public Office

Viv Ansanm claims to have created its own political party, but its leaders are unlikely to seek public office themselves. Even so, as Haiti grapples with how to replace the transitional authorities whose mandate expires in February 2026, the authorities should take steps to ensure that gang members and individuals willing to collaborate with them are blocked from being part of the new government. Eventual negotiations with the gangs are more likely to succeed if Haitians are convinced that their government is intent on dismantling these groups, but not if they suspect that officials are colluding with crime bosses.

To that end, any individual sanctioned for supporting gangs should be banned from being part of a new transitional administration and from running in future elections. Because the UN Security Council has only sanctioned nine individuals, seven of them gang leaders, this list will have limited value in holding accountable all of those who support gang activities. Security Council members should instead use the extensive information provided by the Sanctions Committee's Panel of Experts to sanction individuals who have contributed to the creation, financing or arming of gangs.¹⁷¹ Barring them from using their influence in public office would strengthen the deterrent effect of sanctions and help prevent further collaboration among politicians and armed groups.

¹⁷⁰ These could be led by individuals specialising in community dialogue aimed at violence reduction, as well as local and international experts in transitional justice. Good candidates would be women who have been trained to prevent child recruitment by gangs and support the reintegration of minors who leave these groups, as described above. "United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti: Report of the Secretary-General", op. cit., p. 8.

¹⁷¹ The panel publishes an annual report that is publicly available. Information on individuals who could be sanctioned, however, is restricted to confidential reports to the Security Council.

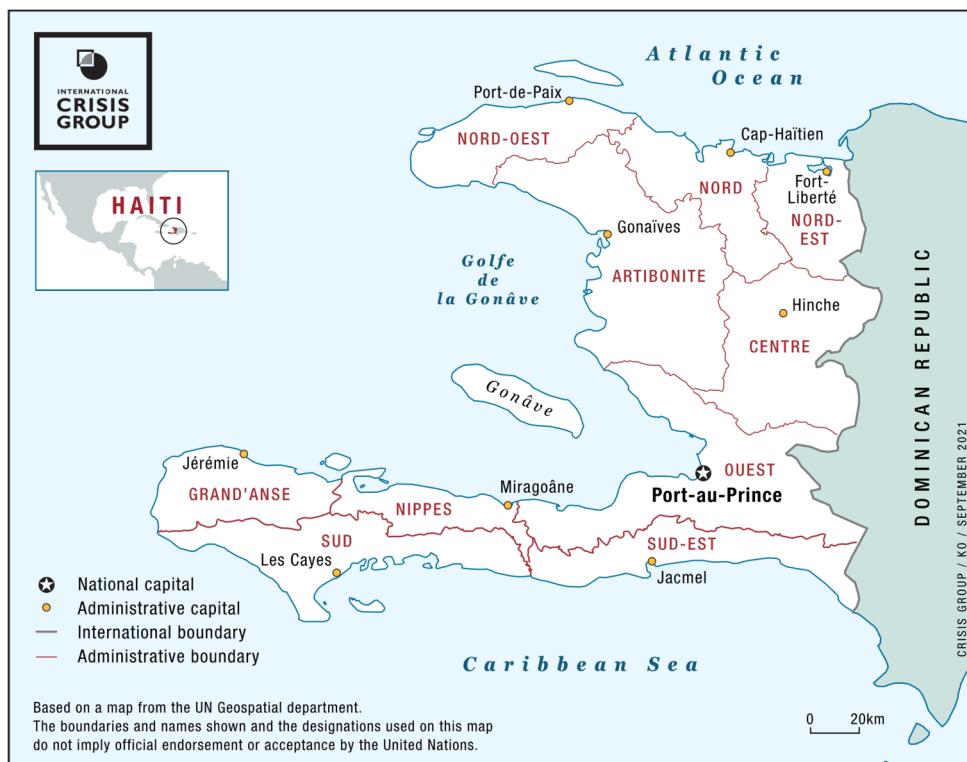
VII. Conclusion

Viv Ansanm poses the most severe threat Haiti has faced in decades. National and international efforts to stop the gang coalition's violent expansion have fallen short. The next months could well see the country's beleaguered authorities coming under even greater strain. Gangs are likely to try to take advantage of the political transition of early 2026 and any gaps in the provision of foreign armed support to demonstrate their military might. If fully funded, the Gang Suppression Force, which will have a stronger mandate than its predecessor, could help turn the tide against the gangs. But for that to happen, the authorities will need a strategy that relies on more than sheer force.

Shows of firepower in areas where the gangs are dominant will be a useful deterrent, signalling to both gang leaders and rank-and-file members that surrendering to the authorities is their best path forward. Once the state has the upper hand over the gangs, it should be willing to negotiate with their leaders the best means of protecting civilians and, eventually, the route to full demobilisation. Past efforts have shown that eliminating gang leaders and arresting members may bring temporary calm. But violence will likely resurge unless the groups are thoroughly disarmed and those who have supported them are held accountable. Achieving armed supremacy over gangs would mark a huge breakthrough for Haiti, but unless more is done to dismantle these groups, halt their recruitment and sever their links to power, it would amount to little more than a pause in the battle.

Port-au-Prince/New York/London/Brussels, 15 December 2025

Appendix A: Map of Haiti



Appendix B: About the International Crisis Group

The International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation, with some 120 staff members on five continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and resolve deadly conflict.

Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries or regions at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international, regional and national decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes CrisisWatch, a monthly early-warning bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in up to 80 situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

Crisis Group's reports are distributed widely by email and made available simultaneously on its website, www.crisisgroup.org. Crisis Group works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analyses and to generate support for its policy prescriptions.

The Crisis Group Board of Trustees – which includes prominent figures from the fields of politics, diplomacy, business and the media – is directly involved in helping to bring the reports and recommendations to the attention of senior policymakers around the world. Crisis Group is co-chaired by President & CEO of the Fiore Group and Founder of the Radcliffe Foundation, Frank Giustra, as well as by former Foreign Minister of Argentina and Chef de Cabinet to the United Nations Secretary-General, Susana Malcorra.

Comfort Ero was appointed Crisis Group's President & CEO in December 2021. She first joined Crisis Group as West Africa Project Director in 2001 and later rose to become Africa Program Director in 2011 and then Interim Vice President. In between her two tenures at Crisis Group, she worked for the International Centre for Transitional Justice and the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General in Liberia.

Crisis Group's international headquarters is in Brussels, and the organisation has offices in seven other locations: Bogotá, Dakar, Istanbul, Nairobi, London, New York, and Washington, DC. It has presences in the following locations: Abuja, Addis Ababa, Bahrain, Baku, Bangkok, Beirut, Caracas, Gaza City, Guatemala City, Jerusalem, Johannesburg, Juba, Kabul, Kyiv, Manila, Mexico City, Moscow, Seoul, Tbilisi, Toronto, Tripoli, Tunis, and Yangon.

Crisis Group receives financial support from a wide range of governments, foundations, and private sources. The ideas, opinions and comments expressed by Crisis Group are entirely its own and do not represent or reflect the views of any donor. Currently Crisis Group holds relationships with the following governmental departments and agencies: Australia (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade), Austria (Austrian Development Agency), Canada (Global Affairs Canada), Complex Risk Analytics Fund (CRAF'd), Denmark (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), European Union (Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace, DG INTPA), Finland (Ministry for Foreign Affairs), France (French Development Agency), Germany (Federal Foreign Office), International Organization for Migration, Ireland (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade), Japan (Japan External Trade Organization), Latvia (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Principality of Liechtenstein (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Luxembourg (Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs), Malta (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade), The Netherlands (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Norway (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Qatar (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Republic of Korea (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Slovenia (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Sweden (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Switzerland (Federal Department of Foreign Affairs), United Nations World Food Programme, and the World Bank.

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