CRS Report for Congress

Received through the CRS Web

Humanitarian Crisis in Haiti: 2004

nae redacted
Foreign Affairs Analyst
Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Trade

Summary

Since armed rebels seized control of Haiti's fourth largest city, Gonaives, on February 5, 2004, and protests calling for President Aristide's resignation culminated in his departure on February 29, there has been increasing concern about a looming humanitarian crisis in Haiti. With events on the ground constantly shifting and an increasing lack of security, assessments of the humanitarian situation remain fluid and subject to change. This report covers recent developments and the humanitarian response to the crisis by the United States and other international actors. It will be updated as events warrant. For further information, see CRS Issue Brief IB96019, *Haiti: Issues for Congress* by (name redacted).

The Republic of Haiti covers an area of 10,714 square miles (about the size of Maryland).[1] Located in the central Caribbean, Haiti makes up one-third of the island of Hispaniola and shares a border to the east with the Dominican Republic. Population estimates range from 7.5 million to 8.3 million, with roughly 80% living in poverty.[2] According to the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), with an annual per capita income of $400, Haiti is "the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere." Contributing factors include its high infant and maternal mortality, malnutrition, and severe health issues (such as AIDS); Haitians have an average life expectancy of 53 years. Poor literacy rates, poverty, and eroding natural resources combined with political unrest, economic decline, and increasing insecurity have contributed to a lack of development and investment.[3]

---

[1] U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, Background Note: Haiti, November 2003.

[2] CIA, The World Fact Book, "Haiti." United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "UNHCR Regional Office Washington Hotspot Profile on Haiti," UNHCR Regional Office for the U.S. and the Caribbean, February 2004.

[3] U.S. Agency for International Development, "Budget Justification to the Congress," Fiscal Year 2004. See also, USAID/Haiti: Population and Health at [http://www.usaid.gov/ht/health.html] and USAID: Haiti at [http://www.usaid.gov/haiti/].

Humanitarian relief efforts since February 5, 2004, have been very limited due to insecurity, chaos, and lack of access within the capital and on roads throughout the country. Distribution of food and provision of health care remain the issues of greatest concern. Protection of civilians and humanitarian organizations are also a top priority. The offices of a number of humanitarian organizations in Haiti have been looted, although the violence witnessed around President Aristide's February 29 departure appears to have eased with the presence of U.S., French, and Canadian military forces on the ground.

Recent Developments by Sector

Food Security. It has been reported that food stocks, stored by the World Food Program (WFP) and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), could last several months if appropriately distributed. USAID estimates that a total of 20,000 metric tons is currently available.[4] Lack of road security has so far prevented the WFP from delivering some food aid, particularly in the north, where floods in December 2003 had already affected 25,000 people. Estimates suggest that more than 250,000 beneficiaries of food aid in the north could now be affected by suspended food distributions.[5] Moreover, eight hundred tons of food and other non-food items were looted from the WFP warehouse in Cap-Haitien on February 22, 2004. As a result of the insecurity and unrest, the WFP suspended shipments of rice to Cap-Haitien.[6] The rural areas are of less concern than urban areas in terms of the impact of the conflict on local food availability.[7] On March 5, WFP began to deliver food rations to a hospital and orphanage in Port-au-Prince from its warehouse in the capital. This is the first distribution in a couple of weeks. If security continues to improve, WFP is to increase its deliveries in March to include 66,000 people in the capital.[8]

Health. Provision of basic health services and the availability of drugs and medical supplies in hospitals remain of critical concern. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), in cooperation with the Haitian Red Cross, is sending convoys to several cities with medical supplies. It is also coordinating its work with other National Societies, such as the French Red Cross and Netherlands Red Cross. The World Health Organization (WHO), which leads the Inter-Agency Crisis Committee along with the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), is coordinating with U.N. agencies such as the U.N. Children's Fund (UNICEF) and U.N. Population Fund (UNFPA), other international partners, and the Haitian Health Ministry to coordinate humanitarian aid and supply main

---

[4] According to WFP, one metric ton is enough food to feed 2,000 people a day.

[5] UNHCR, "UNHCR Regional Office Washington Hotspot Profile on Haiti," UNHCR Regional Office for the U.S. and the Caribbean, February 2004.

[6] U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), "Haiti: Socio-Political Crisis OCHA Situation Report No. 2," February 25, 2004.

[7] USAID, "Haiti: Complex Emergency Fact Sheet #3 (FY2004)," March 1, 2004.

[8] WFP, "First WFP Truck Hits the Road in Haiti to Take Food to Orphanage," March 5, 2004.

hospitals and operating centers.[9] They are also working with PROMESS, Haiti's central pharmacy to supply essential drugs.[10]

The Committee is now also focused on guarantees of security for convoys and medical personnel. The ICRC reports that armed incursions have taken place in hospitals, where the lives of medical staff and patients have been threatened, equipment destroyed, and supplies looted. The ICRC is also increasing efforts to appeal for security for aid workers and civilians.[11]

Fuel. Fuel scarcity is being reported as a critical problem throughout the country, particularly in the north.[12] There are concerns that this will delay humanitarian relief operations and have an impact on relief services, such as the delivery of food, generation of electricity for potable water supplies, and provision of health care.[13] On March 2, PAHO began distributing much need fuel supplies at 10 Haitian hospitals.[14]

Population Movements. So far there have been very limited population movements — approximately 30 Haitians are seeking asylum in Cuba, 62 in Jamaica and 300 in the Dominican Republic. No large groups of internally displaced persons (IDPs) have been reported.[15] The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is setting up contingency plans in the event of a mass exodus from Haiti. A UNHCR Emergency Coordinator has been assigned to the region.[16] The Dominican Republic, a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, had reportedly hinted at possible border closures, but UNHCR has assigned an emergency and planning expert to the Dominican Republic who is to remain there for the duration of the crisis and assist with contingency efforts.[17] The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) is focused on those leaving the country and working with National Societies in the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, and Cuba.

---

[9] OCHA, "Haiti: Socio-Political Crisis OCHA Situation Report No. 2," February 25, 2004; USAID, "Haiti: Complex Emergency Fact Sheet #1 (FY2004)."

[10] Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), "PAHO Asks Respect for Health Centers in Haiti Crisis," February 23, 2004.

[11] International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), "ICRC Boosts Aid and Calls for Respect for Civilians and Medical Personnel," March 4, 2004.

[12] USAID "Haiti: Complex Emergency Fact Sheet #2 (FY2004)."

[13] OCHA, "Lack of Fuel Disrupting Life in Northern Haiti,"February 24, 2004.

[14] PAHO, "PAHO Seeks to Restore Service at 10 Key Haitian Hospitals," March 2, 2004.

[15] International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), "Red Cross Rallies Round for Haiti Refugees," March 4, 2004.

[16] UNHCR, "UNHCR Regional Office Washington Hotspot Profile on Haiti," UNHCR Regional Office for the U.S. and the Caribbean, February 2004.

[17] UNCHR, Public Information Section, "UNHCR Urges International Support for Haitians and Right of Asylum," February 26, 2004. For more information on the 1951 U.N. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and/or its 1967 Protocol, see CRS Report RL31690 *United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)* by (name redacted) and (name redacted).

Some reports by the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) suggest that people may be moving from insecure areas into the mountains and from some rural areas into the main cities, making needs assessments more difficult at this time.[18] The deportation of undocumented Haitians from the United States was suspended on February 23, 2004, due to the violent situation emerging in Haiti.[19] However, as of February 28, the United States has removed 717 Haitians back to Haiti thus far in FY2004.[20] As of March 2, 2004, the U.S. Coast Guard has interdicted 2,053 Haitians in FY2004.[21] For more information about Haitian migrants, see CRS Report RS21349, *U.S. Immigration Policy on Haitian Migrants,* by (name redacted).

Foreign nationals, including U.S. Embassy and U.N. non-essential staff and dependents, have been evacuated, although access to airports and main roads of the capital may have delayed some departures.

Protection of Human Rights. Congress has been concerned with the protection of human rights and with security conditions within Haiti. During President Aristide's second term, increases in political violence renewed concerns over security and police effectiveness. In 2001, President Aristide announced a "zero tolerance" policy toward suspected criminals. According to various human rights reports, this announcement was followed by numerous extrajudicial killings by the Haitian National Police and lynchings by mobs. The government's respect for freedom of the press continued to deteriorate. According to the State Department, "The [Haitian] government's human rights record remained poor, with political and civil officials implicated in serious abuses."[22]

New concerns over human rights violations are presented by the leaders of the armed rebellion which contributed to Aristide's resignation. Both Louis Jodel Chamblain and Guy Phillipe were members of the Haitian military. Chamblain is the alleged leader of a death squad responsible for killing thousands of civilians after the 1991 military coup against former President Aristide. Philippe, who was also a police commissioner in Cap-Hatien, fled into exile after being accused of involvement in a coup attempt against President Preval in 2000. Philippe says he wants to reconstitute the Haitian army, and reportedly declared himself its head on March 2, 2004. The Haitian army, which had a long history of human rights abuses, was disbanded in 1995.

---

[18] OCHA, "Haiti: Socio-Political Crisis OCHA Situation Report No. 2," February 20, 2004.

[19] OCHA, "Haiti: Socio-Political Crisis OCHA Situation Report No. 2," February 25, 2004.

[20] Department of Homeland Security, Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

[21] Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Coast Guard.

[22] State Department's Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for the Year 2003.

Response to the Humanitarian Crisis in Haiti

U.S. Government Assistance. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and its Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) conducted an assessment mission from February 9-11, 2004 and sent a permanent three-person team to Haiti on February 24. Ambassador James B. Foley, the U.S. Ambassador to Haiti, declared Haiti a disaster on February 18, 2004, making it eligible for U.S. humanitarian assistance. As of early 2004, OFDA had provided $50,000 for transport and delivery of medical supplies, $87,000 for medical kits, $400,000 to PAHO for medical supplies and relief activities, and $412,287 for Catholic Relief Services to provide emergency cash grants, for a total of $949,287 in humanitarian assistance.[23]

The Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) at the State Department is also actively involved in providing assistance. It released $20,000 in Ambassador's Funds in February. The ICRC has appealed to donors for 4.6 million Swiss francs (US$3.6 million) to cover relief operations over the next several months. PRM plans to respond with a significant amount of support, although final numbers are pending approval. Other appeals appear to be focused on medical and food assistance which are the main areas of concern at the moment. Contingency planning for refugees and monitoring needs in other areas will continue as the situation in Haiti unfolds.

Interaction, a coalition of US-based relief organizations, reports that a number of its affiliates are coordinating relief on the ground and from the United States.[24]

International Humanitarian Actors. Humanitarian actors responding to the crisis in Haiti also include U.N. agencies, international organizations, NGOs, and bilateral and multilateral donors.[25] The U.N. Secretary-General appointed John Reginald Dumas of Trinidad and Tobago as the Special Advisor on Haiti on February 26, 2004. The U.N. established an Inter-Agency Humanitarian Mission which conducted an assessment of the situation. It is currently focused on coordinating relief through a Task Force with representatives from all U.N. agencies involved (WFP, WHO/PAHO, UNICEF, OCHA, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), UNFPA, U.N. Development Program (UNDP), U.N. Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)), assisting the U.N. Resident Coordinator and the U.N. Country Team with information sharing and decisionmaking involving the humanitarian actors in Haiti, and negotiating the safe, neutral, and effective delivery of aid through a "Humanitarian Corridor."[26]

International donors have also been making commitments to assist Haiti. For example, on March 4, 2004, the European Commission earmarked 1.8 million euros for the provision of health care, protection for civilians and humanitarian organizations, and

---

[23] USAID, ""Haiti: Complex Emergency Fact Sheet, #3 (FY2004)," March 1, 2004.

[24] InterAction, "InterAction Members Respond to Humanitarian Crisis in Haiti," [http://www.reliefweb.int]. See also [http://www.interaction.org].

[25] OCHA, "Haiti: Socio-Political Crisis OCHA Situation Report No. 2," February 20, 2004.

[26] OCHA, "Haiti: Socio-Political Crisis OCHA Situation Report No. 2," February 20, 2004.

humanitarian aid to be funded through the European Commission Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO). [27] The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, which supports the projects of various NGOs, is making an assessment of the humanitarian situation and need for a mission. So far, the Swiss NGOs have focused on the provision of clean water, health and education. UNICEF airlifted 30 tonnes of material, equipment and supplies into Port-au-Prince on March 3.

On February 29, 2004, under Resolution 1529 (2004), the U.N. Security Council authorized the deployment of a Multinational Interim Force (MIF) for three months to help restore order in Haiti. The MIF may grow to 5,000 troops. Its mandate covers a range of tasks, including "to facilitate the provision of humanitarian assistance and the access of international humanitarian workers to the Haitian people in need."[28]

---

[27] European Commission Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO), "European Commission Earmarks EU1.8 million in Emergency Funding for the Crisis in Haiti," March 4, 2004.

[28] U.N. Security Council, "Security Council Authorizes Deployment of Multinational Force to Haiti for 3 Months, Unanimously Adopts Resolution 1529 (2004)," February 29, 2004.