



April 7, 2016

Letter from the Haitian-American Community to U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry on Elections in Haiti

The Honorable John Kerry
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry:

We respectfully urge the State Department to chart a far different and better course in Haiti than it has so far. We believe that the Department's positions to date have undermined Haiti's democracy while harming the United States' credibility in Haiti. We request that the United States adopt a policy that prioritizes respect for Haitians' democratic rights, not political expediency.

Recent U.S. policy towards Haiti has contributed to a dangerous process of political polarization. On December 26, the day before an election evaluation commission was set to review allegations of irregularities, U.S. Ambassador Peter Mulrean announced to the Haitian press that there were no irregularities. This undiplomatic interference in Haiti's internal affairs generated outrage across Haiti's political and social spectrums. In January, U.S. diplomats pressed for second-round presidential and legislative elections to be held on the basis of dubious official results, even though the Catholic and Protestant Churches, the Chamber of Commerce, most political parties, electoral observation organizations and human rights groups, and tens of thousands of protestors were calling for better elections. Fortunately, the January 24 vote was postponed, giving Haiti some much-needed political breathing room. An interim leadership took over when President Michel Martelly's term expired on February 7 and is working to restart the stalled electoral process.

This transitional period gives Haiti a chance to correct deep flaws in the election process and create a stable foundation moving forward. Haiti's elections to date have been unacceptable by

any reasonable democratic standard. Widespread violence, disorder, and fraud characterized the August elections, while in October the results were badly skewed by fraudulent votes cast using over 900,000 political-party accreditations in circulation. Historically-low turnout and corruption scandals within the CEP further undermined the vote's credibility.

Haiti's leading electoral observation bodies for these reasons consider a full and independent investigation into voting fraud to be an indispensable condition for re-establishing confidence in the electoral process. This demand is supported by a broad spectrum of human rights leaders, opposition parties, and civil society groups, and by tens of thousands of Haitians who have taken to the streets repeatedly in the past few months.

As members of the Haitian diaspora in the U.S., we have spoken out repeatedly in favour of a fraud investigation. On January 19, 43 Haitian-American organizations, 34 political, religious, and community leaders, and 66 other individuals wrote you urging U.S. support for an independent, Haitian-led investigation into electoral fraud. This followed similar calls for a verification of the vote in a December 2 statement by a coalition of Haitian-American organizations and a Congressional call-in day organized by Haitian-Americans on December 23. The editors of the *Miami Herald* and the *New York Times* have likewise urged the United States to support an inquiry into the electoral fraud.

Members of Congress have urged the same course. Rep. Maxine Waters (D-CA) wrote you on October 5 and again on January 21 warning of the dangers of trying to push ahead with deeply flawed elections. U.S. Representatives Katherine Clark (D-MA), Frederica Wilson (D-FL) and Alcee Hastings (D-FL) also wrote you urging free and fair elections in Haiti. "Many of my Haitian-American constituents and their families are deeply concerned about fraud in Haiti's electoral process," wrote Clark.

But U.S. diplomats continue to disregard the broad consensus of Haitian political and civil society and of Haitian-Americans in favor of an investigation. U.S. officials, contrary to all the evidence, have insisted that the electoral results are credible and that the runoff should proceed based on the current, strongly-contested vote totals. They do so despite the cloud of political illegitimacy this would cast over Haiti's next government. We find this near-fixation with holding quick elections deeply troubling, given the interim authorities' mandated responsibility to conduct "an evaluation of the phases already completed."

U.S. diplomats have said their priority is to have a stable government in place quickly, but in the past our government's prioritization of "stability" over the most basic requirements of democracy has only led to further instability. We therefore strongly urge you to make the following specific changes to U.S. policy to facilitate restarting the democratic process:

- **The U.S. should support investigations into the flaws and deficiencies of the August and October elections and any and all consequent recommended corrections to them.** Investigating the massive fraud in the elections and re-running races will take time and money but is far preferable in the medium and long term to an illegitimate legislature and presidency disrespected by most Haitians.

- **The U.S. priority should be elections done well rather than simply quickly.** The transitional government should be replaced as soon as possible by a constitutional government, but for Haiti to progress the next government must be fairly elected and perceived to be legitimate. It will take time to get that right. The U.S. must let Haitians decide what steps need to be taken to rebuild trust in the elections and how much time is needed to accomplish these tasks.

Rushing the transition government's work would predictably have the same effect as did rushing the previous Evaluation Commission and the second round: it would make it impossible to establish the credibility of contested election results and to restore popular faith in the balloting. If there is a lesson to be learned from the recent past, it is that Haitians will reject the U.S. dictating the pace and direction of their political process.

- **State Department officials should publicly and forcefully condemn calls by Martelly supporters, especially drug dealer and 2004 coup leader Guy Philippe, to violently oppose the transitional government.** State Department envoy Kenneth Merten has denounced opposition protests during which incidents of vandalism occurred as "electoral intimidation" that was "not acceptable." But neither Merten nor any other U.S. representative in Haiti has so far spoken out against the far more serious threat of armed rebellion by pro-Martelly paramilitary forces or the inflammatory calls to insurrection made by Guy Philippe (now a Senate candidate) on January 24, February 29 and March 7. Persisting in this sort of egregious double-standard is inherently dangerous and feeds the broad mistrust that many Haitians already feel toward U.S. motives and policy.

We urge you to break the State Department's silence on these disturbing recent developments. When you visited Haiti on October 6, you declared that "violence and intimidation have no place in the election process." The threat of paramilitary violence is hanging over the head of the transitional government as it attempts to restore fairness and credibility to the electoral process. Given Philippe's role in overthrowing Haiti's elected government in 2004, his known involvement in drug trafficking (Philippe is on the DEA's Wanted list), and his close ties to former President Martelly and the right wing, U.S. officials should loudly and clearly denounce this electoral intimidation rather than ignoring it. *The weapons of illegally-armed groups cannot be allowed to determine or in any way influence the solutions adopted to resolve Haiti's electoral crisis.*

Having narrowly avoided being saddled with a President of dubious legitimacy for the next five years, Haiti now has a chance to remedy the credible and well-documented fraud allegations that have dogged the 2015 elections. Haiti's interim authorities have made progress toward forming a government, and a political dialogue has been opened with many different sectors of Haitian society. But the crisis is far from resolved due to disputes over the application of the political accord and real and credible threats of right-wing paramilitary violence. We hope that the United States will change its approach to Haiti's elections, becoming a force for compromise and democratic principle rather than polarization and conflict.

Sincerely,

Organizations

1. 1804 Institute, Prospere Charles, President, Washington, D.C.
2. Association of Haitian Professionals (AHP), Joseph Depestre, President, Washington, D.C.
3. Center for Self-Sufficiency, Edeline B. Mondestin, RN, BSN, Executive Director, Miami, FL
4. Diaspora In Action, Joel Leon, Executive Director, Philadelphia, PA
5. Fanm Ayisyen nan Miyami/Haitian Women of Miami, Inc (FANM), Marleine Bastien, MSW, LCSW, Executive Director, Miami, FL
6. Global Haitian Diaspora Federation, Bernier Lauredan, M.D., Executive Vice President, Irvington, NJ
7. Haiti Solidarity Network of the North East (HSNNE), Jersey City, NJ
8. Haitian American Grassroots Coalition (HAGC), Jean Robert Lafortune, Chairperson, South Florida
9. Haitian American Lawyers Association of New Jersey, Karen Nazaire, Esq., President
10. Haitian American Lawyers Association of New York, Annel-Stephan Norgaisse, Esq., President
11. Haitian Diaspora for Democracy and Development, Jimy Mertune, President, Orlando, FL
12. Haitians for Democracy in Haiti, Etzer Lalanne, Secretary General, Leesburg, FL
13. Haitian Professionals of Philadelphia (HPP), Stephanie Sylvain, Board Chairperson, Philadelphia, PA
14. Haitians Unified for Development and Education (HUDE), France Casseus, Chair/Executive Director, Jersey City, NJ
15. Institute for Justice & Democracy in Haiti (IJDH), Brian Concannon, Executive Director, Boston, MA

16. National Alliance for the Advancement of Haitian Professionals (NAAHP), Serge Renaud, President, Hillside, NJ
17. National Haitian Student Alliance, Lucson Joseph, President, Fort Lauderdale, FL
18. Positive Women United, Sylvia Cothia, Founder and President, New York, NY
19. Sant La, Haitian Neighborhood Center, Inc., Gepsie M. Metellus, Executive Director, Miami, FL
20. The Haitian League, Bernier Lauredan, M.D., President, Irvington, NJ
21. Voice of Haitian Americans in the Diaspora (VHAD), Daniel Eugene, President, Boca Raton, FL
22. Centre International de Documentation & d'Information Haitienne, Caraïbénne & Afrocanadienne (CIDIHCA), Frantz Voltaire, Board President, Montreal, Quebec, Canada
23. Haiti Support Group, Shodona Kettle, Chair, London, United Kingdom
24. 1199 SEIU United Healthcare Workers East, Monica Russo, Executive Vice President, Florida Region
25. Black Alliance for Just Immigration (BAJI), Opal Tometi, Executive Director, Brooklyn, NY (Ms. Tometi is a co-founder of #BlackLivesMatter.)
26. SEIU Florida State Council, Monica Russo, President
27. South Florida Interfaith Worker Justice, Rev. Jeanette Smith, President, Coral Gables, FL
28. South Florida Progressive Jewish Action, Jack Lieberman, President, North Miami, FL

Individuals

29. Daphne D. Campbell, State Representative, Florida House of Representatives (District 108), State of Florida; Vice Chair, National Haitian American Elected Officials Network (NHAEON)
30. Alix Desulme, Vice Mayor and Councilman, City of North Miami, FL (representing District 4)
31. Mackenson Bernard, Commissioner, Florida Election Commission (2014-2015); Member, Florida House of Representatives, District 84 (2009-2012); Commissioner, City of Delray Beach, FL (2008-2009)

32. Philippe Derose, former Councilman and Vice-Mayor, City of North Miami Beach, and former Mayor, City of El Portal, FL (Mr. Derose was the first Haitian American elected to public office in the United States.)
33. Pierre Imbert, Senior Advisor on Haiti, The Barr Foundation (2010 to present); Deputy Director, Department of Social Services, State of California under Governor Schwarzenegger (2008-2010, three years); Director, Office of Refugees and Immigrants, Commonwealth of Massachusetts under Governor Romney (2005-2007); and Executive Director, Catholic Charities Haitian Multi-Service Center, Boston, MA (1994-2005), Cutler Bay, FL
34. Jocelyn McCalla, human rights advocate and former Executive Director, National Coalition for Haitian Rights, New York, NY
35. Harry Fouche, economist and former Consul General for Haiti in New York; Chicago, IL
36. Myrtha Desulme, Assistant Vice-President for Advocacy and Public Policy, Haitian Diaspora Federation (HDF); President, Haiti-Jamaica Society
37. Ven. Archdeacon J.Fritz Bazin, Episcopal Diocese of S.E. Florida, Miami, FL
38. Rev. Dieufort Jean Fleurissant, Executive Pastor, Voice of the Gospel Tabernacle Church, Mattapan, MA and Strategy Team Member, Greater Boston Interfaith Organization (GBIO), Boston, MA
39. Guerda Nicolas, PhD, Associate Professor, Department of Educational & Psychological Studies, School of Education and Human Development, University of Miami, Coral Gables, FL
40. Georgette Delinois, Chair, Saint Anastasia Haiti Support Group (SAHSG), Teaneck, NJ
41. Marie N Lamothe, Executive Director of BANJ Health Center, a community health facility in Los Angeles, CA; candidate for Mayor of Carrefour, Haiti in the October 25, 2016 elections; owner of Radio Communaute Haitienne 2000 (aka RCH2000), a radio station in Port-au-Prince, Haiti; Los Angeles, CA
42. Luckner Bayas, PE, General Secretary, Congres des Ingenieurs, Architectes, Scientifiques et Technologues Haitiens (CIASTH), Boston, MA
43. Marie Marthe Saint Cyr, Board member, YAM Community Resource Center, Inc., Huntington, NY
44. Dabouze Antoine, City Councilman, Forest Park, GA
45. Moise Garcon, President, Plan D'Action Citoyenne (PAC, Citizens Action Plan), and Vice-President, Ayiti Demain (Haiti Tomorrow), Miramar, FL

46. Jean-Claude Roy, CFP, ChFC (retired), formerly consultant to Haitian Prime Minister Jean Jacques Honorat; long active in politics in Haiti; in charge for the CEP in 1987 of the first attempt to computerize election results, aborted due to the massacre; Boca Raton, FL
47. Ford Eloge, President, Leve Haiti Piwo (Raise Haiti Higher), West Palm Beach, FL
48. Eddy Toussaint Tontongi, Editor-in-chief, Review Tanbou, Boston, MA
49. Larousse Desrosier, political analyst at Radio ImageFM (Boston), Randolph, MA
50. Jacques P. Bingue, Ph.D, Lexington, KY
51. Professor Yves. A. Isidor, Executive Editor, Wehaitians.com, a journal of democracy and human rights; formerly affiliated with the University of Massachusetts-Dartmouth, where he taught economics, and Lesley University among other institutions of higher learning; Cambridge; MA
52. Charlot Lucien, Public Health Administrator, Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Boston, MA
53. Thomas F. Luce, Coordinator, Human Rights Accompaniment in Haiti (HURAH.org), Berkeley, CA
54. Romane Petit Joseph, Labor Union Organizer, UniteHere-Local 355, Miami, Florida
55. Yvelt Daniel, political activist, Linden, NJ
56. Orisseau Acelas, Pharm.D, Rph, West Palm Beach, FL
57. Harry Comeau, Freeport, NY
58. Fritz Jean Baptiste, law school graduate in Haiti (Gonaives); Los Angeles, CA
59. Dumas M. Simeus, Southlake (part of the Dallas – Fort Worth metroplex), TX
60. Maydjine Louis Charles, Bay Harbor Islands, FL