



Ms. Tania María Abdo Rocholl

Chair, Human Rights Committee

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

Palais Wilson - 52, rue des Pâquis

CH-1201 Geneva (Switzerland)

Via E-mail: ccpr@ohchr.org; ohchr-ccpr@un.org

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**NGO Report on Haïti for the 143rd Session of the Human Rights Committee /
Rapport des ONG sur la République d'Haïti pour la 143ème session du Comité
des droits de l'homme**

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Introduction

1. The Centre for Voters Initiative & Action presents this report to the United Nations Human Rights Committee ahead of the 143rd Session for the review of Haiti. The Centre is a non-governmental organisation based in the Americas with an international focus. The Centre acknowledges there can be no secure tomorrow without ensuring civil societies have knowledge to vote, participate, and engage with the democratic processes.
2. The Centre works with multiple international mechanisms to convey dialogue, conduct research, and bring awareness to the thematic issues of electoral engagement around the world. We closely follow and participate in the United Nations human rights mechanisms in Geneva and abroad, including the Human Rights Committee, to promote civil society participation in the public affairs process.
3. The Centre submits this ahead of the second periodic review of Haiti under the International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights. Recognising the complex nature of the recent challenge Haiti faces, the Centre hopes to provide valuable information to the Committee regarding the State's compliance with issues exacerbating non-compliance under Article 25. Indeed, this report is focused on the scope of Article 25, and we encourage Committee members to understand the nature of civic education as a tool to combat this contemporary turmoil; hopefully, the Committee will find this report valuable.
4. The Centre has submitted this petition to the Committee to focus on three specific violations: (1) cycles of turmoil preventing civic education; (2) a lack of progress towards gender equality, particularly with regards to the role of women in politics and decision-making; and (3) gang violence instilling a culture of fear, thereby stifling participation in the civic process.

Cycles of Turmoil Preventing Civic Education

Economic Constraints

5. Haiti is one of the poorest countries in the world, and their pervasive poverty significantly stifles equal access to education. With over 50% of Haiti's civil society living below the poverty line, many families struggle to afford basic school essentials: fees, uniforms, supplies, etc.
6. The financial burden subsequently leads Haitian children to pursue other avenues for financial stability, such as entering the labour force at young ages; as a result, financial burdens lead to low enrolment in schools and high dropout percentages. Furthermore, private schools constitute nearly 85% of education centres, exacerbating the issue of unaffordability for education for Haitian children.¹

¹ Alexandra Drugescu-Radulescu, "Educational Challenges in the Republic of Haiti", *Broken Chalk*, <https://brokenchalk.org/educational-challenges-in-the-republic-of-haiti/>.

7. Furthermore, almost a quarter of Haitian children suffer from malnourishment, preventing Haitian children from being healthy enough to escape the cycle of poverty and turmoil. Food insecurity leaves education low on the priorities list; after all, Haitians must first survive before they can live. Yet living life only to survive each day is fundamentally contradictory to the pursuit of happiness and the right to live ones life in a thriving manner. Indeed, to combat these instabilities, work must happen on the grassroots levels.
8. Furthermore, the lack of educational facilities is an implication of the dire economic situation. Haiti ranks 177th out of 186 countries in terms of government spending for education, and, does not currently have a plan for increasing the education budget.² Despite education being inscribed since the first Haitian Constitution, only 15% of schools are state-funded.³ Due to high tuition fees for schooling, education is a luxury rather than a right; consequently, the attendance rate of children is only 28% in lower secondary schools and 21% in upper secondary schools.⁴
9. In Haiti, the ability to receive education is a luxury, not a right, and the government certainly has yet to act because of its poor state. Yet the low education focus will only exacerbate current issues as disenfranchised children stray away from education because of current factors, continuing to contribute to cycles of turmoil.
10. Since children receive little to no education, they most certainly do not see any focus on civic education. The lack of education as a result of economic implications indeed has political ramifications: since children are not taught about the public affairs process nor their ability to participate, they are not only trapped in a cycle of turmoil, but also a cycle of misrepresentation as an implication of their lack in knowledge. The widespread lack of knowledge about Haiti's political process prevents future generations from engaging with politics, thereby lacking meaningful avenues to enact change.

The Centre is alarmed by the poor economic conditions of education in Haiti, preventing children from escaping cycles of political misrepresentation. Considering this knowledge, the Committee should ask what steps the Haitian government is taking to expand education in Haiti, especially with civic education. Furthermore, the Committee should ask Haiti why its education programmes are inaccessible to the average Haitian, and request the government provide increased funding to education systems.

The Committee should declare that the participation of young voters in Haiti is significant, and that public awareness and civic education are mechanisms for achieving full political participation. The Committee should press for civic education in schools, particularly through the establishment of public schools with government support.

² Kindly refer to <https://schoolsforhaiti.com/facts-about-haiti/>.

³ "Dropping out of school: An unwelcomed trend in Haiti", UNESCO, 26 October 2020, <https://www.iiep.unesco.org/en/articles/dropping-out-school-unwelcomed-trend-haiti/>.

⁴ Data derived from UNICEF database on Haiti: <https://data.unicef.org/country/hti/#education/>.

Language Barriers in Education

11. Officially, Haiti is bilingual, with French and Haitian Creole as its official languages as prescribed by the government; however, French dominates educational settings, despite the fact that a significant portion of the population primarily speaks Haitian Creole.⁵ Indeed, education – as established above – is a luxury to those who can only afford it, and, the education that does exist is tailored to those with increased socioeconomic prowess. Haitian Creole is not a language with high prowess; rather, French is the language of education and knowledge because of social connotations.
12. Therefore, despite the dominance of Haitian Creole in the civil society, the cultural apathy towards it is reverberated in education, creating linguistic barriers when it comes to learning. The use of French as a primary language for instruction can certainly impede the understanding of students and their engagement with acquiring knowledge, thereby limiting their ability to fully receive education on avenues for participation in the public and political sphere.

Lack of Progress for Gender Equality

Insufficient Laws on Gender Equality

13. Unfortunately, Haiti has a history of discrimination based on gender which is enforced by social norms and tradition. To combat this, legal measures against gender discrimination are important. Compared to other countries in the region, Haiti has fewer legal provisions to promote gender equality and equal opportunity for employment.⁶ Despite Haiti having quotas for female representation in lawmaking bodies and public administration, there is still a lack of female workers in these fields.
14. The UN's Sustainable Development Goals have indicators to give perspective on the progress and next steps a country can take. However, only 44.4% of the laws and legal framework set by these indicators are in place, meaning that violence and discrimination against women is still not protected enough by the government.⁷ Even if a woman does manage to hold employment, on average, she would earn 32% less than a man.⁸

⁵ Michel DeGraff, William Scott Frager, and Haynes Miller. "Language Policy in Haitian Education: A History of Conflict Over the Use of Kreyòl as Language of Instruction", *The Journal of Haitian Studies*, Vol. 28 No. 2, 2022, https://lingphil.scripts.mit.edu/papers/degraff/DeGraff_Frager_Haynes_2022_History_of_language_policy_in_Haitian_education.pdf

⁶ "Trump's Pause of U.S. Foreign Assistance to Latin America: An "America Last" Policy", *WOLA*, 31 January 2025, <https://www.wola.org/analysis/trumps-pause-of-u-s-foreign-assistance-to-latin-america-an-america-last-policy/>.

⁷ Kindly refer to <https://data.unwomen.org/country/haiti/>.

⁸ "Haiti: Selected Issues", *International Monetary Fund*, Volume 2020 Issue 122, 20 April 2020, <https://doi.org/10.5089/9781513541501.002/>.

15. Haiti's pay gap for women in labour is greater than even that of surrounding Latin American neighbours; working women in the region earn, on average, 70 cents for every dollar earned by men in Latin America and the Caribbean.⁹ Indeed, in Haiti, this disparity is worse than the regional average. With so many barriers for women in the workforce, there is little incentive for either party to resolve gender discrimination. For this reason, there must be fundamental changes made to the legal framework in Haiti to benefit women and prevent the enforcement of gender inequality.

Lack of Women in Decision-Making Mechanisms

16. Gender inequality can be seen in many parts of life in Haiti including in the workforce. The country's workforce is made up of 47.36% female workers in 2023.¹⁰ However, there is still a lack of female representation in higher positions including parliament, public service, and as judges or prosecutors. They do not have the same opportunity as men in these fields which offer better pay and influence in the processes of the country. Additionally, they get paid nearly one their less than men on average, leaving them with less financial freedom.
17. Indeed, discrimination against women and girls has always been a feature of Haitian society, including as a legacy of abuse towards Black women's bodies born of colonialism and enslavement. Women and girls face added barriers to education, accessing funds and resources, and participating in the formal economy. They have been kept out of positions of authority and political leadership. Haiti has had one of the lowest levels of women's political representation in the world, often suppressed by targeted violence. Pervasive patriarchal and discriminatory stereotypes exacerbate such structural barriers through expectations around family roles, gendered activities, and permissive attitudes towards gender-based violence.
18. The Centre has critically analysed the representation and participation of women in the public affairs process. Indeed, it is important to note that the patriarchal and gender-discriminatory systems are ever-so-prevalent in Haiti that they stifle the participation of women in public life. Women in Haiti represent less than 30% of the ministers, only 2.7% of the National Assembly as of the 51st legislature, and nearly 11.7% of the Haitian national police. Furthermore, there are no women on the Superior Council of the Judiciary and have roughly 13-15% standing in the judicial system.
19. Women are far from being enshrined in the Haitian political system; ever-evolving cultures of fear and patriarchy ultimately stifle women from achieving the 30% quota which has been previously prescribed by other international organisations. This was the result of a 2012 Parliament amendment passed, yet international experts and

⁹ Phoebe Ishak and Mariel Siravegna. "The Gender Wage Gap in Latin America and the Caribbean: A Deeper Dive", *The World Bank*, 16 September 2024, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/latinamerica/the-gender-wage-gap-in-latin-america-and-the-caribbean/>.

¹⁰ Metrics from <https://tradingeconomics.com/haiti/labor-force-female-percent-of-total-labor-force-wb-data.html>.

Haitian civil society alike remain concerned by the status of the State party's implementation of this amendment.

20. Indeed, no meaningful actions seem to have been taken by the government to achieve this quota, and the Committee might take interest in the lack of a centralised deadline surrounding this mechanism. If there is no deadline on this programme for women to involve themselves in the public / political life, one must wonder if there will ever be meaningful action taken towards getting women involved in government. Indeed, it has been 13 years since this amendment, yet little progress has been seen, undermining the rights of women in both Articles 2 and 25, for gender inequality being reflected in the civic process.

Considering this information, particularly the concerning statistics regarding the status of women and cultural nuances stifling their participation, we urge the Committee to enquire to Haiti what steps and measures it is taking to ensure the participation of women in decision-making mechanisms despite the pervasive cultures of fear.

Furthermore, the Committee should also take note of Haiti's Constitution requiring women comprise at least 30% of all public positions, including government appointments and elected officials, as a result of their 2012 Parliament amendment. The Committee should ask for the status of implementation of this amendment by Haiti, or steps being taken towards meeting its goals.

Harmful Gender Stereotypes and Social Norms

21. The country's social norms and traditions limit the progress that can be made on gender equality as the citizens in Haiti enforce their gender expectations. Haiti's views on women are generally traditional. Many believe the women should take care of the house, cooking, cleaning, and the family. These societal expectations limit the women's ability to create a life outside of their home. They have much difficulty attaining managerial positions or jobs as leaders because Haiti's traditional views lead to discrimination.
22. The society's norms affect the dynamics within families and extend beyond their homes. Almost a third of women have experienced violence from their spouse as traditional views deem it acceptable to physically attack a woman in Latin America, including Haiti.¹¹ These stereotypes and traditional views have become normal for many in the country, leading women to lack solidarity in their struggles amongst each other. Their internalized sexism has occasionally prevented them from making progress in gender equality. For example, in 2010 Mirlande Manigat lost the elections in part because female voters didn't want to be led by a woman.¹² For

¹¹ Kindly refer to footnote 8.

¹² Onz Chéry. "Haitian women confront gender barriers and solidarity gap in quest for representation", *Haitian Times*, 4 April 2024, <https://haitiantimes.com/2024/04/04/haitian-women-confront-barriers/>.

women to make strides in the workforces by gaining higher positions, people must be able to shift their mindset on women's roles in Haiti.

23. As long as these harmful gender norms prevail in Haiti, women will lack a voice and the power to advocate for themselves. This struggle against societal norms must be addressed and fought by men and women alike. Through this change there will be greater opportunity for women to acquire better jobs and be respected by their peers and Haitian citizens.

Violence Against Women

24. As Haiti has seen a rise in gang activity, they have also experienced a rise in violence against women. This issue has also been exacerbated by Haiti's gender inequalities and political instability. Sexual violence has become a means of intimidation, punishment, and control throughout the country.¹³ The use of violence has led people, especially women, to feeling unsafe and limited them from exercising their rights or speaking up against this control.
25. Additionally, Haiti's disasters affect men and women unequally. Women's limited access to information and limited economic opportunity make it more difficult for them to recover from these situations. Because of this, they are at a higher risk of domestic and societal violence.¹⁴ Even while aid is being distributed in shelters, the imbalance of power between men and women makes them more susceptible to desperate, abusive men.¹⁵ During these disasters and difficult times, women need additional protections to prevent any kind of violence.
26. The use of sexual violence against women by individuals affects dynamics in the country. While gangs use it to further their control and expand their territory, the practice spreads, making it more difficult to control. Through this struggle, the government has been absent and despite the criminalization of rape, there is no one to enforce it. The victims are often unable to report these incidents and have any legal action taken in their defence.

The Committee should note how the normalised culture of violence against women fundamentally undermines their morale and willingness to take part of the Haitian political and public life. The Committee should further enquire what steps are being taken to combat sexual violence, including use of the police force and laws as a mechanism to instil harsh punishments for violators, given the current lack of laws or proposed reforms suggested otherwise.

¹³ Christopher Hernandez-Roy and Juliana Rubio. "The Gender-Based Violence Crisis in Haiti", *Centre for Strategic and International Studies*, 19 September 2024, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/gender-based-violence-crisis-haiti/>.

¹⁴ "Haiti Gender Assessment Report", *The World Bank*, 25 May 2023, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/haiti/publication/haiti-gender-assessment-report/>.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Gang Violence Stifling Participation in the Civic Process

Role of Elites in Reinforcing Gang Violence

27. The assassination of Haitian President Jovenel Moïse in July of 2021 propelled a series of events that became an unprecedented gang takeover of Haiti.¹⁶ The former President was assassinated by a group of elite Haitian police and did not hold elections after. In 2024, the country suffered an extended series of gang attacks aimed at Haiti's Prime Minister to prevent him from having control of the country.¹⁷
28. However, it is important to note that the violence due to gangs was exacerbated by officials in power themselves. Haiti has never been equipped with arms or militia. Over the years, western powers have attempted to intervene in strengthening the country but in an inefficient manner. Therefore, past Haitian leaders have used gangs to control the country. The increased power given to gangs has propelled their takeover of the country because of prior corrupt governments and elites.¹⁸ Currently, Haiti lacks a president and is governed by the Prime Minister: Alix Didier Fils-Aimé, and a transitional presidential council. The next elections are set to be in February of 2026, but many Haitians are dubious of this happening.¹⁹
29. The lack of organization in Haiti is a direct contributor to the lack of civic action by its citizens. Haitians have not had an election since 2016, and if elections do occur in 2026, that will have marked a decade since they were last involved in electing their President. While stopping gangs is vital to the progression of Haiti, there needs to be a larger focus on helping victims of the gangs. If people don't have food or shelter because of gangs, their civic participation will be non-existent.

Impact of Gang Violence on Children

30. Women and children have been particularly targeted by gangs in Haiti. While all Haitians have faced violence at the hands of gangs, children have been targeted more recently. As the political crisis in Haiti continues to evolve, weak groups such as children and women are impacted most significantly.²⁰
31. Education and healthcare have been impacted by the violence and instability in Haiti. Schools and hospitals have been targeted in Haiti's capital.²¹ Without necessary education, children are not able to engage in the appropriate learning that is vital during years of growth. Lack of illiteracy will continue to rise due to the lack of

¹⁶ Dánica Coto. "Haiti forms provisional electoral council to prepare for its first elections since 2016", *Associated Press*, 18 September 2024, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/amp/world/haiti-forms-provisional-electoral-council-to-prepare-for-its-first-elections-since-2016/>.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Vibhu Mishra. "Children face unprecedented crisis amid rising violence in Haiti", *United Nations*, 11 November 2024, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/11/1156826/>.

²¹ Ibid.

education, which will impact the future generation's agency towards improving their government. Targeting hospitals also has a significant impact on the health of children.

32. Children have been the target of gangs in terms of recruitment and attacks on children not involved in gangs. Violence against minors such as abuse, sexual harassment, and rape.²² Violence not only impacts the safety and health of children, but it also impacts their mental health as well. Traumatic events such as these can lead to further deterioration of youth health in Haiti as a result.

Gang Violence Instilling a Culture of Civic Turmoil

33. Indeed, gang violence in Haiti has contributed to a culture of civic turmoil; as a result of gangs being intertwined with the political elite, gangs have worked themselves into the fundamental mechanisms of government, preventing true civil society voices from prevailing in face of dominant gangs and powerful oligarchs.

As a political implication of gang violence, Haiti has now found itself in a culture of turmoil in regards to its civic participation, undermining political stability. With regards to elections, the security crisis has made it difficult to conduct elections: the ever-present threat of violence deters political participation by suppressing voter turnout, undermining the legitimacy of elections.

34. Even more so, the transitional government's attempts to organise elections have continued to be rivalled by insecurity, leading to elongated periods without elected representatives. Even with reforms, gang leaders have continued to work in tandem with elites to exploit power and seize power.

Considering the threats Haiti faces to maintaining a stable, secure, and representative political system, the Committee should enquire Haiti on actions it is taking to ensure gang violence, in tandem with elites, have no further control on the civic process.

The Committee should recognise the political implications of Haitian gang violence on democracy, and ensure the concluding observations reflect the need for immediate action to be taken to combat the role of gangs in instilling a culture of fear in the democratic process.

²² Kindly refer to <https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/11/1156826/>.

Conclusion

35. In conclusion, the human rights situation in Haiti as it concerns civics participation is concerning. The Centre hopes the Committee has found this information useful and will centre its concluding observations on the as outlined in this report. The Centre strongly advocates for comprehensive reforms focused on ensuring Haiti places emphasis on public education amongst youth to promote civic engagement, strengthens the role of women in politics and decision-making, and works to combat violence derived from gangs and elitism.
36. In particular, the Committee should focus its dialogue with Haiti on the barriers preventing civic education due to economic hardship and linguistic exclusion, the lack of meaningful progress toward gender equality in political participation despite existing legal provisions, and the dangerous entrenchment of gang violence in the political process, which continues to instil fear and suppress civic engagement. These systemic issues directly undermine the core of Article 25 rights for Haitian civil society and threaten the foundation of democracy in the country. We hope they will be addressed to ensure a future where Haitian citizens can freely and meaningfully participate in public life.
37. This submission may be published on the OHCHR website or any other places necessary. For any enquiries regarding this submission, please contact Executive Director of the Centre, Mr. Samad QURASHI, at squraishi@cvia.ch. Many thanks to primary contributors Mr. Santiago RUIZ PÉREZ, Ms. Julia ELLIOT ORTEGA, and Ms. Miranda ELLIOT ORTEGA. You may reach them at srperez@cvia.ch, jeortega@cvia.ch, and meortega@cvia.ch, respectively.