

Political Developments and the Electoral Process

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El mayor éxito de las elecciones del 7 de febrero y el 21 de abril de 2006 y la victoria de René Préval como Presidente de la República, significó para Haití una oportunidad extraordinaria para poner fin a años de violencia política, crisis económica y pobreza extrema.

Palabras clave: *pobreza – inseguridad – restablecimiento democrático – política migratoria*

The massive success of the 7 February and the 21 April 2006 elections and the victory of René Préval as President of the Republic represented for Haiti an extraordinary opportunity to put an end to years of political violence, economic decline and extreme poverty. From the outset, Government officials as well as representatives of international organizations have publicly stated that the first 100 days of the elected administration were crucial to lay down the foundations of the enormous recovery effort ahead of them. In his inaugural “Declaration of General Policy” pronounced before the National Parliament on June 6, 2006, Prime Minister Jacques Edouard Alexis set as his main priority the creation of a climate of security in the country in order to promote social and economic development.

Despite the enormous challenges, the government of Haiti demonstrated political decisiveness to improve the living conditions of impoverished citizens and announced the launching of an ambitious plan to fight extreme poverty: The Program of Social Appeasement (PAS). The PAS set out to serve as an emergency program to confront the critical social and economic situation in the country. It was designed to remove obstacles to social integration and focussed on governmental intervention in marginalized urban areas and rural zones considered pockets of poverty. However, with the envelope of international aid constituting 66% of the public budget, Haiti has been obliged to wait for international donors to start implementing this and other crucial initiatives. The Program of Social Appeasement is currently paralyzed given the lack of available funding.

This extreme dependency has become critical in the electoral domain as well. Eleven elections, including run-offs, are scheduled to be held from 2007 to 2011 with an estimated cost of some US \$183 million. Haitian authorities find themselves today in an uncomfortable position of having to depend on international aid to sustain the democratic process as it is stipulated in both the Constitution and in current electoral law.

Since its formation, the Government has had to face protest organized by Lavalas popular organizations who demanded the return of former President Jean Bertrand Aristide, the cancellation of arrest warrants emitted by the Interim Administration against Lavalas militants and the liberation of “political prisoners”. On February 7, 2007 demonstrations were held in several cities across the country on the occasion of the 16th anniversary of former President Aristide’s first investiture. The different marches organized in Port-au-Prince, Mirâgoane, Cap Haitian and Les Cayes were characterized by hostile chants against the presence of the UN mission in Haiti as well as, in some cases, President Préval himself.

Gradually, some sectors of LAVALAS that had supported Preval for the presidential run last February 2006 have started to express their disappointment with the current administration and have begun with political party representatives from across the spectrum to build a political opposition. Over recent months there has been considerable discussion among Parliamentarians from all the major parties about the need to replace the Prime Minister. The group has however been unable to build the majority needed to replace the head of Government.

The institutional normalization of Haiti opened the way for the country to be officially readmitted to CARICOM on July 3, 2006 at its 27th Summit in St. Kitts & Nevis. On that occasion, President Préval emphasized that Haiti’s full participation in CARICOM was fundamental to achieve economic development and regional stabilization. Seven months later, at the end of the 18th Summit of Presidents and Chiefs of Government of CARICOM that took place from 12-14 February 2007 in Kingstown, Saint Vincent, Prime Minister Jacques Edouard Alexis announced the reopening of CARICOM offices in Port- au- Prince.

Although gang leaders declared a truce before, during and for several months after the Presidential elections, a resurgence of killings, kidnappings, carjackings, robberies and intra-gang violence of all sorts was registered in Port-Au-Prince after the second week of June. More than 25 people, among them women and children, were killed on July 7, 2006 in the popular neighborhood of Martissant, in the south of Port-au-Prince, by members of rival armed gangs.

Many local residents subsequently fled the area in order to avoid future violence. On July 19, 2006 clashes between armed gangs and the blue helmets of the UN mission occurred leaving several dead and injured. A private security guard working at the **OAS Special Mission electoral facilities** in Port-au-Prince was shot dead on Saturday 5 of August 2006 by unidentified armed men.

Given the continued “insecurity” in the capital region, the Haitian population has at times The sense of insecurity and tiredness present in the population was manifested its discontent and taken matters into their own hands through “popular justice”. Residents of Bel-Air, for example, reaffirmed on September 2006 their determination to fight the actions of gangs in their district after having lynched with machetes and stones two bandits who had abducted a 7 year old child.

The urgency to solve the problem of urban insecurity exerted considerable pressure on the government and Parliament representatives alike who decided to accept the allocation of a US \$3.2 million dollar envelope to study the possibility of creating a new security force over the next year, despite the Haitian Armed Force’s long record as a destabilizing factor in the country. The urgent need to equip and provide Haitian National Police with the means to fight criminality as well as a request made by the Haitian Government, contributed to the partial lifting of the embargo on arms imposed by United States of America on Haiti since 1995.

Since December 2006 MINUSTAH has been stepping-up offensives to eradicate armed gangs operating in Port-au-Prince slums, particularly Cite Soleil and Martissant. This situation, together with the graduation of 500 new recruits from the Police Academy who were immediately deployed in the capital, produced a considerable improvement in the security situation. Some of the most wanted gang leaders in the country like Evens Jeune and William Baptiste, nicknamed « Ti-Blanc », were arrested and will be charged with serious offences.

In terms of Governance and despite the high level of dispersion of political forces in the National Assembly, the Parliament responded satisfactory to the call made by Mr. Préval to approve the budget for the 2006-2007 fiscal years. On September 27 and 28, 2006, representatives of both chambers passed the budget.

The financial law adopted by the House of Representatives includes a public budget for the fiscal year 2006-2007 of approximately US \$1.7 billion which, compared with the budget for the 2005-2006 fiscal year, represents an increase of 68.53%.

During the first week of January 2007, however, a financial scandal with political implications erupted in the Senate. Senator Gabriel Fortuné (UNION, South Department) denounced publicly that at least ten senators had received bribes in exchange for votes in favor of a resolution regarding the SOCABANK affaire. The bank "SOCABANK", presumably responsible for massive fraud perpetrated against shareholders, was taken over by the Haitian Central Bank (HCB) after a presidential decree was issued by Préval last January 24, 2007. 24 hours later, the Senate passed a resolution obliging the Government to abort the "tutelage" operation and called for a negotiated solution between SOCABANK Directorate and the Haitian Central Bank. Weeks of media coverage on the scandal damaged the image of the Parliament among the Haitian public.

Most political analysts, journalists and members of the academia agree on defining the Haitian constitution of 1987 as a source of political instability. Nevertheless, the amendment process prescribed in the constitution is extremely complicated and slow. Aware of this institutional weakness, President Préval decided in June 2006, to ask the well-known historian Claude Moïse to hold consultations on the matter. On March 6, 2007, Prime Minister Alexis confirmed to the press that discussions were being held with political party leaders, journalists, specialists and other civil society actors regarding possible constitutional reform. Dual nationality, the death penalty, electoral law and the Armed Forces are among the subjects that may be proposed for review.

In the electoral arena, and although Haitians had been twice to the polls during 2006 and had successfully elected a President and 115 of the 129 members of the Legislative Branch, The Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) with the financial support of the governments of Canada, United States, Brazil and the European Union, organized legislative second runs and local and municipal elections to complete the large decentralized governmental structures foreseen by the Constitution. In a climate of uncertainty due to the deterioration of security conditions in the weeks preceding E day, Local and Municipal Elections took place on December 3, 2006. 29.000 candidates competed for 7.500 public post forming the decentralized structures of local government. The election took place in 820 voting centers comprising 9.230 polling stations. Besides local and municipal authorities, Haitians elected 11 pending deputies and 3 senators to complete the national parliament.

On average, a low-medium level of turnout was registered all over the country. The turnout was higher in rural areas although it did not reach that of the last parliamentarian run in April 2006. (32% of the voting list).

In terms of electoral tendencies, the ruling coalition LESPWA had a good showing and ended ahead in all categories. The Social Democrats of FUSION finished second and OPL held the third position.

Four deaths were reported at the end of E day as a consequence of clashes between the national police and violent elements who tried to disrupt the electoral process.

The OAS Special Mission performed observation activities in at least 15 voting centers in Port-au-Prince and Cap Haitian.

As during the previous presidential and parliamentary runs, the CEP requested specifically the OAS technical assistance for the printing of the voting list for the 9.230 polling stations as well as the designing of bulletins to be electronically distributed to political parties and local CEP offices. In the same vein, the OAS was in charge of administering and providing the vote tabulation system that had been used in previous elections guaranteeing the integrity of the process as well as maximum transparency.

As part of the supporting tasks lent to the CEP, a member of the OAS SM joined the Emergency Group established by the electoral institution for E day.

As a result of the local electoral process, in March 2007, 72 mayors were sworn-in. Having been defeated in the municipalities of Port-au-Prince, Carrefour, Pétion-Ville, Delmas and Cité Soleil, the ruling coalition Lespwa remains relatively weak in the West department where it will only control Tabarre, an old bastion of former President Aristide.

Re-runs to complete some of the local posts and a pending deputy position will be held on April 29th 2007.

With the decentralized governmental officials elected, a new process to complete the institutions of the republic begins. The locally elected assemblies will start a process to appoint judges and to form a Permanent Electoral Council in charge of organizing, administering and proclaiming the results of future elections.

In the international arena, Préval points out the necessity and utility of a south-south cooperation framework calling for the ABC group (Argentina, Brazil and Chile) and other third world countries like Venezuela to stand by and support Haiti in its efforts towards development. In this vein, President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela paid a visit to his homologue Rene Préval last March 2007 and signed with both President Préval and Cuban vice President

Juan Laso Hernandez a cooperation agreement on energy and oil. Beside the trilateral accord, Chavez signed three bilateral agreements with Prével totaling US\$ 88 million and inaugurated a US \$20 million fund to provide humanitarian aid to Haiti and develop joint cooperation projects.

Despite leftist rhetoric, the United States remains not only the most important bilateral donor, having promised to disburse US \$492 million for the 2006-2009 period, but also the main commercial partner of Haiti.

Prime Minister Alexis met with US Secretary of State Rice during a 4 day trip to the United States in early April 2007. Among the topics on the agenda were the Haitian immigration policy and the operational aspects of the HOPE initiative. The Prime Minister announced at the end of the encounter that an additional US \$200 million aid package had been promised by the American administration. Secretary of State Rice stressed that Haiti had made immense progress in one year's time.

With an envelope of international aid constituting 66% of the public budget, Haiti is obliged to perform complicated diplomatic pirouettes in order to keep receiving as much foreign aid as possible.

International Community

The international community has shown a strong commitment to Haiti, attending a ministerial conference in Brasilia on May 23, 2006 and a pledging donor's conference in Port-au-Prince on July 25, 2006 as a result of which US \$750 million were promised to help develop the country during the 2006-2007's period. The OAS was represented in this important event by the Assistant Secretary General Albert Ramdin.

Furthermore, UN Secretary General Koffi Annan visited Port Au Prince on August 3, 2006 to support the peacekeeping mission in Haiti which had been undergoing strong criticism over several months.

From November 20 to November 21, 2006 OAS Assistant Secretary General Albert Ramdin paid a second visit to Haiti in order to reaffirm the commitment of the organization to the country and to analyze with Haitians authorities the projects and programs in which the OAS would have a leading role. During his visit, the ASG had fruitful meetings with President Préval and the Prime Minister Alexis.

Several regional and global partners have expressed throughout 2006 their political and financial commitment to help Haiti to regain ground on its path to nation building. Among them, The European Commission which recently decided to adopt Haiti as a "pilot country partner". Through this new initiative the EU will put in place a new strategy of common programming by which Haiti will have to deal with all EU donors in a unified and centralized manner. The EU has pledged a 223 million euros aid for Haiti for the period 2007-2012.

On June 20, 2006 The World Bank announced that the institution would give Haiti a 2 million dollar grant, and a week later, the Government of Belgium made a similar announcement giving two million euros for salaries of public servants.

On August 4, 2006 the "2 for 7" summit was held which groups Vice Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Defense portfolios of Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Peru, Uruguay, Ecuador and Guatemala in the Argentine capital, Buenos Aires with the presence of OAS Secretary General Jose Miguel Insulza. Discussions were held on the political and institutional situation of Haiti, the cooperation framework with Haitian Government and the renewal of the MINUSTAH's mandate.

During the same month, the Haitian National Assembly ratified the Pétrocaribe agreement signed on inauguration day, May 14, 2006 between President Préval and Vice President of Venezuela Jose Vicente Rangel, and, later on, the European Union made effective a deposit of 10 million euros for budgetary support to the Haitian government following the commitments assumed by the institution during the International Conference on Haiti held in Brussels on April 20, 2005.

On September 15, the United States Ambassador in Haiti announced the granting of a US \$492 million dollar donation to Haiti to help the country in the development of social programs, the creation of services and the fight against HIV-AIDS.

On November 22, 2006 the Executive Board of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) approved a three-year arrangement for Haiti under the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility Program (PRGF) for a total amount equivalent to US\$ 109.5 million. The initiative will aim at supporting the government's economic program. Throughout the same week, the Governor's committee of the Inter-American Developing Bank (BID) announced that their members had reached an agreement on a framework to reduce the debt of five countries of South and Central America, among them Haiti. Even though the amounts are not clear yet, Haiti could benefit from a important reduction of around US\$ 300 million out of a US\$ 860 million owed until now to the financial institution.

In February 2007, Haiti was included among the fifteen countries to benefit from a US\$ 85 million allocation from the UN Central Fund for Urgent Interventions. Since this fund came into operations in May 2006, US\$ 162 million have been distributed among underdeveloped countries. An envelope of US\$ 2 million will be reserved for Haiti.

On March 4th, 2007 the state-run development bank of Venezuela announced the creation of a US\$ 20 million fund to provide humanitarian aid to Haiti and develop joint cooperation projects. The Foreign Minister of Venezuela stressed that Haitian authorities would use the fund for basic necessities including health care, education, housing and sanitation.

Finally and as a consequence of the Madrid Conference and the setting up of a bilateral aid commission between the Haitian and Spanish Governments, Haiti will benefit from a ten million Euro grant for budgetary support and another 60 million Euros for Haiti will be disbursed by the EU during the next three years.

Disarmament.

After several failed attempts in Haiti's recent history for the implementation of Disarmament and Demobilization programs, the President of the Republic decided, despite sharp criticism drawn from members of his own party and civil society, to put in place a new strategy, commonly referred to as the "carrot and stick" approach, in which negotiation for voluntary disarmament has been combined with an aggressive role in forcibly disarming those who are illegally armed and choose not to join the program.

The declarations made by Mr. Préval inviting local armed gangs to dialogue were severely criticized by different sectors of civil society, and several deputies of his own political coalition. However, according to specialists of the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Program (DDR), it is essential for the Government to have a specific policy to deal with different armed gangs in which negotiation should play an important role.

Together with this new approach including direct negotiation with armed elements, the President created a National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (NCDDR) made up of seven members representing different portfolios of the Haitian Government which is in charge, together with the Disarmament section of the MINUSTAH, of implementing a new program to find solutions to economical difficulties and social isolation suffered by armed gang members.

The main objective of this initiative, that excluded gang chiefs, was to convince illegally armed individuals to join the program by offering them a package of socio-economic benefits including pocket money, education and/or job training. Some two hundred people have joined the program and more than 188 weapons have been seized so far by the National Commission. Negotiations with several armed groups are ongoing in different "hot" neighborhoods of Port-au-Prince and Gonaïves.