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May 28, 2020

The Honorable Michele J. Sison
U.S. Ambassador to Haiti
U.S. Embassy in Haiti
c/o U.S. Department of State
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Ambassador Sison:

I write to urge you to use your considerable knowledge and experience in Haiti to prevent the country from descending into a downward spiral of chaos and violence.

As a United States Ambassador, it is your responsibility to develop good relations between the United States and the countries in which you serve. The United States cannot have good relations with countries that do not respect the rule of law and internationally recognized human rights. I know you understand this as an experienced diplomat with the rank of Career Ambassador, numerous Department of State awards, and diplomatic assignments dating back to your initial tour as the human rights officer at the U.S. Embassy in Port-au-Prince in 1982. Your knowledge of Haiti and your experience in diplomatic posts around the world make you well positioned to promote respect for the rule of law and basic human rights and influence Haiti's development in a positive direction.

As I am sure you are well aware, recent developments in Haiti have been deeply disturbing. I am especially disturbed by reports that a death squad headed by Jimmy Cherizier, commonly known as "Barbecue," accompanied by three Haitian National Police armored personnel carriers invaded Cité Soleil Tuesday, burning houses and killing people. This violent attack reportedly follows violent attacks in the impoverished Port-au-Prince neighborhoods of Tokyo, Delmas, and Pont-Rouge over the previous two days, in which police officers allied with Cherizier stood by while houses were burned, and people were killed. These reports, if true, represent an outrageous and appalling escalation of politically motivated violence against the people of Haiti.

If the reports are verified, they represent the most recent incidents in an escalating series of violent attacks on residents of impoverished neighborhoods in Haiti that began about two years ago. In April 2019, I led a delegation to Haiti, during which I met with you and also met with residents of La Saline and surrounding areas, who described acts of unconscionable violence that occurred the previous November. Survivors expressed concern that government-connected gangs, working with police officers, carried out the attacks to punish the neighborhood for participation in anti-government protests. In the year since my trip to Haiti, credible

investigations of the La Saline massacre by Haiti's National Human Rights Defense Network (RNDDH),¹ the United Nations (UN) Mission for Justice Support in Haiti together with the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR),² and Haiti's national directorate of judicial police³ have all consistently pointed to politically motivated violence. Yet the alleged perpetrators have never been brought to justice.

I warned in April 2019 that impunity for the La Saline massacre would encourage more violence, and tragically, I have been proven right. A politically motivated attack in the Bel-Air neighborhood on November 4-8, 2019, killed at least 15 people, and it may have been carried out by the very same gang leaders implicated in the La Saline massacre.⁴ Furthermore, OHCHR verified that Haitian security forces were responsible for at least 19 killings between September 15 and November 1,⁵ and Amnesty International reported that Haitian police repeatedly used excessive force during anti-government protests in late 2019, including unlawfully firing live ammunition at protesters and indiscriminately launching tear gas.⁶

I am nevertheless shocked and appalled by the reported escalation of violence over the past week. I strongly urge you to verify whether these reported atrocities have indeed taken place, and if so, condemn them in the strongest possible terms, and demand that the Government of Haiti fully investigate these incidents and prosecute those responsible. Moreover, I strongly urge you to verify whether any Haitian security forces involved in these human rights violations are receiving U.S. funds in violation of U.S. law.

These brutal and unconscionable acts of politically motivated violence in Haiti must stop once and for all.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Maxine Waters". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letter of "M" being particularly large and stylized.

Maxine Waters
Member of Congress

¹ National Human Rights Defense Network (RNDDH), [*The Events in La Saline from power struggle between armed gangs to state-sanctioned massacre*](#), December 1, 2018, pp. 7-8.

² United Nations, [*MINUJUSTH and OHCHR release a report on the violent events of 13 and 14 November in La Saline*](#), June 21, 2019.

³ Charles, Jacqueline, [*Dozens brutally killed, raped in Haiti massacre, police say: 'even young children were not spared'*](#), Miami Herald, July 15, 2019.

⁴ HaitiLibre, [*Haiti - Security: Violence in Bel-Air neighborhood, at least 15 dead*](#), November 10, 2019.

⁵ Hurtado, Marta, [*Press briefing note on Haiti unrest*](#), United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, November 1, 2019.

⁶ Tucker, Duncan, [*Haiti: Amnesty International verifies evidence of excessive use of force against protesters*](#), Amnesty International, October 31, 2019.