

National Haitian-American Elected Officials Network Press Conference
October 6, 2022
Remarks of Brian Concannon, Institute for Justice & Democracy in Haiti

Although we are talking today about extremely difficult conditions in Haiti, I am excited to be here, and grateful to the National Haitian-American Elected Officials Network, and City Councilor Ruthzee Louijeune, for inviting me. I am excited because I am confident that the involvement of Haitian-American elected officials will lead to a US policy to Haiti that is more constructive for Haiti, and will better advance US national interests, including our interest in having peaceful, prosperous neighbors.

I am often called an expert on Haiti, and I do hope that I have learned a few things during the 27 years I have worked on Haitian democracy and justice issues. The most important thing that this experience has taught is that we should listen to Haitians, and let them decide their own future.

We should let Haitians decide who their elected leaders should be. We should let Haitians decide their national economic policy. We should let Haitians decide how they allocate their government's resources. We should let Haitians decide whether to demand justice for their Independence Debt, and whether foreign troops should be on their territory.

Haitians have the right to choose their own leaders, just as people in America do. Haitians know their context, their history and what they want for their future, so they are in the best position to make informed choices.

Letting Haitians decide would seem obvious, except that is the last thing that the US government, under Republican Presidents and Democratic Presidents, is willing to do. We undermined then kidnapped an elected President in 2004, because we did not like his choice of economic policies. We forced the Electoral Council to change the official vote results in 2010 to help our preferred candidate. Haiti's current Prime Minister was installed in power, not through any Haitian procedure, but through a tweet from the Core Group, a group of foreign countries, led by the US that serially interferes with Haiti's internal politics. The Prime Minister is maintained in power through US support, not Haiti's people or its laws.

Last night a former high level State Department official forwarded me an email chain from a group of US officials and foreign policy experts debating what should be done about Haiti. The former official called the discussion mind-boggling, because almost all of the ideas they advanced, including a foreign military intervention and propping up the current leadership, are exactly what Haitians are taking the streets in massive numbers, day after day, to protest. The official asked me if I thought the experts knew how unacceptable their proposals were. I replied that the experts just didn't care. That the experts could not accept that Haitian preferences were that important to decisions that affected their daily lives.

The continued insistence on foreign military intervention is additionally mind boggling because it is such a demonstrably bad idea. A UN peacekeeping mission stayed in Haiti from 2004 to 2017, spending over \$9 Billion. It addressed the gang problem by hunting down and killing

suspected gang members, sometimes killing women and children living or walking nearby. In one operation in July 2005, UN soldiers shot 22,000 bullets, 78 grenades and five mortars into the thin-walled and densely packed houses of the Cite Soleil neighborhood.

The UN executions did temporarily reduce gang violence in Haiti. But they did not address the social and economic conditions underlying gang violence, and the illegal killings and arrests undermined the rule of law, contributing to the gang violence rebounding to levels unimagined before the UN started helping Haiti.

Haiti's crisis is to a large extent the product of this foreign interference. More foreign interference will not be the solution. Now that every type of meddling has demonstrably failed to improve conditions in Haiti, it is time for the US and other powerful countries to let Haitians decide.

Letting Haitians decide means not propping up repressive governments.

Letting Haitians decide means allowing fair, inclusive elections acceptable to the majority of Haitians, even if foreign experts disagree with the results.

Letting Haitians decide means not forcing elected government to compromise on their mandates.

Haitian-American officials have a unique capacity to explain to the Administration that their family and friends in Haiti are fully capable of making decisions about their fate. Haitian-American officials also have the leverage to insist that U.S. polices respect Haiti's sovereignty and its peoples' rights.

I look forward to NHAEON's advocacy achieving a US policy that supports a democratic, Haitian-led and sustainable solution to Haiti's crises.