

Haiti Rally
Statement by Rep. Maxine Waters,
To be read aloud by Brian Concannon.
Sunday, October 9, 2022

Greetings! I thank all of the organizers of this important demonstration for inviting me to join you in standing up for human rights in Haiti. I know there are more than 100 organizations supporting this rally, and I appreciate all of your efforts to defend the rights of the Haitian people. I especially appreciate the tireless work of the Institute for Justice & Democracy in Haiti (IJDH). So, I have asked its Executive Director, Brian Concannon, to read this statement on my behalf.

I have long urged the United States government to stop supporting the corrupt, repressive regime that has led Haiti into such a deadly crisis, and I wish that I could join you today in person.

In April of 2019, three and a half years ago, I traveled to Haiti to meet with the victims of the November 2018 La Saline massacre. I went to Haiti because I had heard reports that the gangs that conducted the massacre had received support from the Haitian police and government officials. I was concerned that five months after the killing of dozens of people, and multiple rapes, arsons, and assaults, no one had been held responsible.

While in Haiti, I met with people from La Saline who described a series of brutal attacks by gangs that the victims said were supported by the government and the ruling PHTK party. They explained that the attacks were intended to punish their neighborhood for organizing protests against government corruption and brutality.

I was appalled and shocked at what I heard. I returned to the United States, and I told anyone who would listen that if the La Saline massacre and other massacres went unpunished, more attacks would follow. Three years later, no one has been punished for the La Saline massacre, and more attacks follow almost every month, each seeming more widespread and brutal. I am again appalled, but I am not surprised.

The repression in Haiti must stop. Last week, I joined twelve of my colleagues in both the House of Representatives and the Senate urging President Biden to take several steps to clear the way for the Haitian people to restore democracy and order to their country. We noted that many Haitians believe that the current de facto Prime Minister, Ariel Henry, has no interest in leading Haiti closer to democracy

and stability, because of the history of the PHTK using gangs as a tool of repression and its refusal to hold timely or fair elections.

My colleagues and I also explained to President Biden that after decades of U.S. government meddling in Haiti's internal affairs and the current lack of any meaningful criticism of repression under the PHTK and Dr. Henry, many Haitians are convinced that the United States is actively sustaining Henry in power. We urged that U.S. officials stop public messaging that supports Henry's government. We insisted that the U.S. must lend its support for legitimate efforts to create a transitional Haitian government that respects the will of the Haitian people, and the U.S. should make it clear to Henry that it will not support him as he blocks progress.

As much as I am distressed, like you, at the suffering that Haitians endure on a daily basis, I am also hopeful. I am hopeful because Haitians have been winning unlikely battles for freedom since they defeated Napoleon in 1804. I am hopeful because Haitians are taking to the streets this month with a courage matched only by their determination. And I am hopeful because the Haitians fighting for freedom every day are inspiring more people to join them, including everyone who is here today, as well as an increasing group of my colleagues in Congress, and democracy supporters around the world.

There is still an opportunity to place Haiti on track to free, fair, and inclusive elections that are acceptable to the majority of voters. But we must act quickly before the situation deteriorates any further. The time for change in Haiti is now.