

# HAITI: Continental Conference to End Military Occupation by UN's MINUSTAH

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*Delegates from around the world will converge on Port-au-Prince May 31 to take part in a two-day Continental Conference aimed at bringing an end to the United Nations Mission to Stabilize Haiti or MINUSTAH, which marks its ninth anniversary on Jun. 1.*

The military occupation force, which now comprises about 9,000 armed soldiers and police officers from some 50 countries and costs some \$850 million per year, was deployed by the UN Security Council at the behest of permanent members U.S. and France following the Feb. 29, 2004 coup d'état (which Washington and Paris fomented) against former Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. At the time, the world public was told that the mission would be deployed for only six months, time enough to hold new elections. Instead, MINUSTAH is now entering its 10<sup>th</sup> year. Its latest one-year mandate ends Oct. 15, 2013.

The Continental Conference, spearheaded by a Brazilian political action committee called "To Defend Haiti Is To Defend Ourselves," will be attended by activists from the Dominican Republic, Guadeloupe, Brazil, Argentina, Bolivia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru, Mexico, France, Spain, the United States, and other countries. Over 150 delegates from all corners of Haiti will also attend the conference, to be held at the Plaza Hotel in downtown Port-au-Prince.

The Haitian organizing committee, composed of unions and popular organizations, is also organizing a public rally from 3 to 6 p.m. on May 31 in the Place Dessalines on the Champs de Mars in conjunction with the conference.

On Jun. 1, dozens of Haitians will testify before the Conference about MINUSTAH's many alleged crimes, including thievery, rape, murder, and massacres.

From Apr. 15 to 24, outspoken Sen. Moïse Jean-Charles conducted a speaking tour in Brazil and Argentina to build support for the conference, where he will be a leading speaker. "It is an outrage that Brazil and Argentina are doing Washington's dirty work in Haiti," Moïse told a large public meeting held at the Legislative Assembly in Sao Paulo on Apr. 18. "Brazilian and Argentinian troops are not helping Haiti. They are merely defending U.S. imperial interests."

Brazilian soldiers make up MINUSTAH's largest contingent, about 2,200 soldiers. There are about 600 Argentinian troops in the force.

During the 10 day trip to the two countries, Moïse met with government officials, parliamentarians, unionists, students, popular organizations, and the general public, in

meetings both large and small.

On Apr. 16, for example, Senator Moïse met with the Foreign Relations Committee of the House of Deputies in Brasilia. Four deputies, Committee president Nelson Pellegrino and Fernando Ferro, both of the ruling Workers Party (PT), and Luiza Erundina and José Stédile, both of the Brazilian Socialist Party (PSB), held a cordial meeting of over 90 minutes with the senator, who stressed, as he did at other meetings, that the Haitian Senate had unanimously voted a resolution in 2011 calling on MINUSTAH to completely withdraw from Haiti by October 2012. That resolution has been flagrantly ignored by the UN.

Then later that same day, Sen. Moïse met for almost two hours with students at the University of Brasilia, who asked him many questions. “Everybody knows that Brazil is heading up the UN military occupation in Haiti,” he said in response to one question. “But who is making the big money in Haiti? The Americans. Who is giving the orders? The Americans. This game of bluff has to stop.”

Senators, deputies, city councilmen, leaders from large union federations, and prominent activists from Brazil, Argentina, and around Latin America and Europe have pledged to attend the event.

In the build-up to the Continental Conference, meetings have been held in numerous countries. On May 17 in New York, a political and cultural fundraising rally was held at the Riverside Church featuring the renowned musical group Welfare Poets and several other artists. Other speakers included Dr. Fritz Fils-Aimé of the Haitian American Veterans Association (HAVA), Dr. M. Alexandre Sacha Vington of Humanity Haiti, Nellie Bailey of the Harlem Tenants Council, Ralph Pointer, the husband of jailed human rights lawyer Lynne Stewart, and Kim Ives of Haïti Liberté.

“People around the world are standing with the Haitian people in their call for UN troops to get out of Haiti,” said Colia Clark, a veteran civil rights activist who worked alongside Medgar Evers and Martin Luther King, Jr., and who organized the May 17 event. “The upcoming Continental Conference in Port-au-Prince will be the first time people and organizations from around the world will sit down together to see how we can assist our Haitian brothers and sisters in their struggle to regain their sovereignty and send MINUSTAH packing.”

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