

International Gathering Calls for UN Troops to Leave Haiti

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Delegates from across Haiti and the world gathered in Port-au-Prince for a Continental Conference on May 31 and Jun. 1 to map out a world-wide campaign to bring a rapid end to the United Nations Mission to Stabilize Haiti (MINUSTAH), a 9,000-member military force which has occupied Haiti since Jun. 1, 2004.

The delegates met for the two days at the Plaza Hotel, addressed a rally of several hundred people on May 31 on the Dessalines Plaza of the Champ de Mars, and spoke on several radio shows, including Ranmase, Radio Caraïbes's highly popular Saturday morning round-table.

"Haitians, this is a battle for our dignity and pride as a people," Sen. Moïse Jean-Charles, who was a guiding force behind the conference, declared to the enthusiastic outdoor rally in the capital's main square. Haiti's founding father General Jean-Jacques "Dessalines fought for us to be masters of this little patch of land. How can we be occupied by a foreign army over 200 years later? We cannot. We will not."

By the end of the second day of meetings, which included statements and testimony of organizations from all over Haiti, the delegates unanimously approved the following resolution and vowed to continue their struggle.

Resolution of the Continental Conference in Haiti for the Withdrawal of UN-MINUSTAH Troops

To the Governments of Latin America and the Caribbean,

To All the Governments Involved in the Occupation of Haiti

We - the 140 delegates at the conference coming from Haiti, Martinique, Guadeloupe, Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, El Salvador, the United States, Algeria, and France, mandated by our respective organizations and associations - have received messages of support from Guadeloupe, St. Lucia, Martinique, Trinidad and Tobago, the United States, Ecuador, Peru, Brazil, Bolivia (1) and France, among other countries.



On the Champ de Mars, international delegates to Continental Conference hold banner demanding in Portuguese: “Withdraw the Troops from Haiti.”

On May 31 and June 1, 2013 – after nine years of UN-MINUSTAH occupation of Haiti, the first black republic in the world, established in 1804 after a war of liberation against the French colonial power – we met in Port-au-Prince in response to the call issued by the Host Committee of the Continental Conference in Haiti for the Withdrawal of UN-MINUSTAH Troops: “To Defend Haiti Is to Defend Ourselves.”

1 – We heard the testimonies from Haitian citizens and organizations on the consequences of these nine years of occupation.

The speakers who testified confirmed that the abuses by the MINUSTAH forces continue: rape of the youth in Cayes (Port Salut) by Uruguayan MINUSTAH soldiers, repression of union activities and social protests, proliferation of drug trafficking and distribution of fire-arms.

The testimonies confirmed that the troops are in Haiti to protect the interests of the multinational corporations from the United States and its allies – interests expressed, in particular, in the various [U.S.] HOPE laws (2), but also through the shameless exploitation of workers in export-processing zones and the looting of the country, especially its mineral resources.

The testimonies also noted that three years after the earthquake of January 2010, there are hundreds of thousands of Haitians still living in tents in deplorable conditions – and this on top of the massive cholera epidemic brought into Haiti by MINUSTAH troops from Nepal, an epidemic that has already taken the lives of 9,000 Haitians and infected hundreds of thousands of others.



Haitian and international delegates voting in favor of the final resolution of the Continental Conference.

2 - We also learned about and discussed the report dated March 8, 2013, presented to the United Nations Security Council by the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon (3).

- The UN Secretary-General's Report states that MINUSTAH is in Haiti to ensure "security" — but whose security? The Report goes on to state that the "UN Mission is faced with widespread and repeated civil unrest, mainly linked to socioeconomic grievances." The Report also notes that there have been "[f]requent anti-Government demonstrations . . . against the high cost of living, food insecurity and the failure to deliver basic services. From August to October 2012, the number of demonstrations held per month tripled from 22 to 64."

- But then the UN Secretary-General's Report concludes that there is a "need to strengthen the national police and judiciary" and that this "remains a key prerequisite for the Mission's eventual withdrawal from Haiti." In other words, if the forces of repression are not strengthened, the MINUSTAH troops would not get out of Haiti.

As an example of why the UN presence is still needed, the UN Secretary-General points to the "[r]iots in Jérémie (Grand-Anse Department) late in November 2012 and in January 2013 [which] underscored the need for MINUSTAH to continue to be able to airlift a quick reaction force to remote areas in support of the national police."

But these "riots" were in fact mobilizations of the people demanding the completion of the road between Cayes and Jérémie - a road needed to break the region out of its isolation; construction on this road had begun more than three years earlier but was abandoned by the Brazilian OAS construction company.



Julio Turra, National Executive Director of the Unified Workers Federation (CUT), Brazil's largest union, speaking to the crowd on the Dessalines Plaza of Champ de Mars on May 31.

- The UN Secretary-General also emphasizes the need for legislative (Senate) and municipal elections and for preparing the 2015 presidential elections. But he openly acknowledges that neither the previous elections nor the next ones will be organized by Haitian institutions.

In fact, the U.S. government, through the edifice of the MINUSTAH occupation, persists in trampling upon the rights of the Haitian people, in violation of the Haitian Constitution and the very Charter of the United Nations.

What's more, the UN Secretary-General's Report has the gall to state that the UN-MINUSTAH forces are "working to eliminate" the cholera epidemic. These words were stated just a few weeks after the UN refused to take responsibility for the epidemic that was transmitted by the Nepalese troops of MINUSTAH. These words were stated shortly after the UN refused to pay reparations to the victims of the epidemic - under the guise of "diplomatic immunity" of its personnel.

Therefore, it is with horror that we read in the Report, following a series of disclosures that constitute a real indictment against the MINUSTAH occupation of Haiti, the defense by the UN Secretary-General of the decision to maintain the UN-MINUSTAH occupation of Haiti until 2016.

This is unacceptable! This is unbearable!



« La MINUSTAH et le Choléra sont des jumeaux »



Le peuple exigeant la fin de l'occupation de la Minustah

3 - To the governments of the countries of UNASUR (Union of South American Nations):

We appeal to the governments of the countries of UNASUR, whose founding treaty affirms "full respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and inviolability of States and self-determination of peoples."

To the governments of the countries of CELAC (Community of Latin American and Caribbean States):

We appeal to the governments of the countries of CELAC, whose Caracas Declaration also reaffirms the defense of national and popular sovereignty, and moreover welcomes the "more than 200 years of independence of Haiti" and recalls the aid given by the Haitian

people to Simon Bolivar in his struggle for independence against the Spanish colonial power.

MINUSTAH is the negation of all that. MINUSTAH is an occupying force in the interests of U.S. multinationals. The so-called “peace” mission of MINUSTAH is a “peace” mission to exploit the workers, the youth, and the natural resources of Haiti.

Our conference was also addressed by delegates from the United States and France, whose governments are permanent members of the Security Council. They denounced the heinous roles of their governments in this occupation – an occupation that is also against the interests of the workers and peoples in the United States and France. The U.S. delegates, in particular, denounced the coup d’etat of February 29, 2004, that overthrew President Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

The conference concluded that the military occupation of Haiti is part and parcel of the policies of U.S. imperialism and its allies in response to, and as a consequence of, the crisis of the capitalist system, which is accelerating and in this process furthering its policies of war and looting of peoples worldwide, while trampling upon the freedom and sovereignty of nations.

We also wish to recall the following facts:

– On September 20, 2011, the Haitian Senate unanimously passed a resolution calling upon the Haitian government to “put forward before the Security Council of the United Nations the formal request for a gradual, orderly and definitive withdrawal of all components of MINUSTAH in a period not exceeding one year, or no later than October 15, 2012.”

– In a hearing on July 10, 2012, the Foreign Affairs Minister of Brazil – the country in command of the MINUSTAH troops – stated: “I believe that MINUSTAH has already extended its mission longer than desirable.”

– In October 2012, a delegation was received at the United Nations by Mr. William Gardner, then representative of UN Secretary-General Mr. Ban Ki-moon. Mr. Gardner stated that “the UN Security Council would soon take steps to reduce the number of troops in Haiti.”

A year later, where do we stand?

– In Argentina, in April 2013, at a hearing at the Foreign Affairs Ministry, Argentine diplomat Pablo Tettamanti stated: “It is now a problem of internal security in Haiti, and the MINUSTAH forces are not there for that. Before, it was justified, but not now, because the protests are internal affairs of Haiti, and we have nothing to do with that.”

– Even the interim director of the MINUSTAH forces, Mr. Nigel Fisher, said in an interview in February 2013 that “the presence of MINUSTAH in Haiti is leading to a ‘dead end’.”

– Once again, on May 28, 2013, the Haitian Senate passed a resolution calling “for the withdrawal of MINUSTAH. ”

FOR THE IMMEDIATE WITHDRAWAL OF MINUSTAH!

It follows from these observations that the only measure consistent with the sovereignty of the Haitian people and the Haitian nation is the immediate withdrawal of UN-MINUSTAH troops from Haiti!

It is now, right now, that each and every government can and must decide to withdraw its troops. Not one more day for MINUSTAH in Haiti!

As part of the effort to expand our campaign for the immediate withdrawal of MINUSTAH from Haiti with the broadest unity and determination, the bearers of this Open Letter have been mandated by our Conference to convey to you our urgent and unanimous demands:

- Withdraw your troops from Haiti immediately!
- Vote at the UN against the renewal of the presence of MINUSTAH in Haiti!
- Show your solidarity with the Haitian people by requiring UN compensation/reparations for the victims of cholera!

To Defend Haiti Is to Defend Ourselves!

4 - We, delegates from Haiti, Martinique, Guadeloupe, Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, El Salvador, the United States, Algeria, and France, meeting in Port-au-Prince in the framework of the Continental Conference for the Withdrawal of MINUSTAH Troops - with the support of organizations, associations, and personalities in a dozen countries, including Uruguay (4);

- Welcome all the mobilizations and activities demanding the withdrawal of UN troops from Haiti that are taking place across the continent this June 1, 2013 - the 9th anniversary of the occupation of Haiti;

- Resolve to constitute a "To Defend Haiti Is to Defend Ourselves! Continental Coordinating Committee" to continue and strengthen the solidarity and unity of the people through an ongoing campaign for the withdrawal of the UN-MINUSTAH troops occupying the Haitian soil.

The Coordinating Committee will aim to strengthen the coordination between the organizations already involved in this fight: the Association of Workers and Peoples of the Caribbean (ATPC); the Sao Paulo Committee "To Defend Haiti Is to Defend Ourselves"; the Guadeloupe-Haiti Campaign Committee, New York; the Host Committee of the Continental Conference in Haiti and the Mexican Committee For the Withdrawal of UN Troops from Haiti, among the many others, and to allow the emergence of other such committees.

- Propose toward this end a Week of Continental Action on July 29 to August 3, 2013 — with mobilizations in all countries, including rallies, demonstrations, delegations to governments, petitions, etc.

- We pledge as of now, if these actions prove to be insufficient to attain our demands, to prepare the sending of an even broader delegation to the UN headquarters in New York in October 2013, at the time of the ratification of the renewal of UN-MINUSTAH mandate in Haiti.

Endnotes

(1) An entire radio program in Bolivia was devoted to this conference in Haiti.

(2) HOPE: Haiti Opportunity Partnership Encouragement act

(3) Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti

(S/2013/139), March 8, 2013

(4) At the initiative of the PIT-CNT trade union federation, several Uruguayan organizations participated in much of the Haiti conference via Skype.

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