



Department of Social Development and World Peace  
Office of International Justice and Peace

**Background on Haiti**  
**February 2007**

*The current Haitian society calls for a profound change in all constituents. In the name of Christ and his church, we raise up our voices to ask all Haitians to work for the advent of a new society and a new way of governing the country, with a foundation in an orderly state, moral values, and the common good.*

The Bishops of Haiti, September 29, 2004

**THE GENERAL SITUATION:**

A new day may be dawning for Haiti. With the largely successful elections last year and the inauguration of President René Préal, Haiti may have begun the long process of recovery from years of corrupt government, international boycotts, the flight of businesses and the violent attacks of armed gangs. In a concrete recognition of progress, the U.S. Congress this year passed the HOPE Act that provides preferential trade treatment for Haitian goods, a bill that USCCB advocacy efforts did much to support. Internal security is still far from achieved, but there has been a downturn in killings and kidnappings since the elections. An effective national police force is still in its formative stages and will require the continued presence of the nearly 2,000 international police trainers in the country.

The UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti—MINUSTAH—has been roundly criticized for its failure to control the armed gangs with their campaign of kidnappings for ransom. MINUSTAH's original task was to disarm and demobilize the armed actors and reintegrate them into civil society, so far with little success. Widespread criticism of the inaction of the UN mission resulted in a general strike called by civil society groups and allegedly led to the Brazilian force commander's suicide. Discontent with the behavior of many of the troops is widespread, including accusations of proselytizing by some of the troops from Muslim nations. The cultural and linguistic divide between them and the Haitian people is wide and needs to be addressed by the Préal government.

**THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH:**

The bishops of Haiti are seeking their proper role in helping that society find its way to peace and reconciliation. Over the past year they had issued statements on the elections and the role of citizen participation and sent a strong warning against priests running for political office. Catholic Relief Services' Haiti program, one of its largest in the world, is engaged in responding to the bishops' call to help develop the Church's role in promoting lasting peace and true reconciliation. In addition, CRS and other major non-governmental organizations are playing their traditional role of providing critically needed supplies of food and medicines throughout the country.

## **THE ROLE OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY:**

In the months after his election, President Préval completed a very successful round of meetings with the White House, the Congress, the International Monetary Fund, the United Nations the Inter-American Development Bank and the Organization of American States. The urgent financial needs of Haiti, well known for years to all these U.S. and international bodies, may at last begin to be addressed. Mr. Préval has called on other governments, especially those of France, Canada and the U.S., to step up long-term development aid.

At the UN, he made it clear that the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti should not be withdrawn until real security throughout the country is achieved, but he also called for a change in orientation of the mission. He said Haiti needs “fewer tanks and more tractors, more road-building, more construction of waterways.”

At the OAS, he promised to start a national dialogue with all the highly divided political sectors in order to forge a development framework that should last, he said, for a quarter century.

## **TRADE AND HAITI’S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:**

A significant element in Haiti’s economic development could be the restoration of the once vibrant apparel industry. For this to go forward, special tariff concessions must be made for Haiti’s devastated economy to grow. For two years, legislation that USCCB has supported has been introduced in both houses of Congress but did not come to a vote. Both the Haiti Economic Recovery Opportunity (HERO) Act of 2005 and the less generous Haitian Hemispheric Opportunity through Partnership Encouragement (HOPE) Act of 2005 failed to be brought up for a vote by the House leadership.

This year promised to be different. In September, House and Ways Committee Chairman Thomas introduced HR 6142 that included the HOPE language which provides that, for a limited period of time, articles of apparel manufactured in Haiti could be imported into the United States free of duty. In December 2006, with the help of extensive advocacy from the Catholic community, Congress passed and the President signed the HOPE Act. Experts estimate that the bill will create thousands of direct jobs and associated service jobs. While the passage of HOPE was a tremendous victory for Haiti and for a compassionate trade policy, there still remain obstacles to overcome before Haiti begins to benefit. First, Haiti needs to be “certified” by President Bush as qualifying for the trade preferences, a process that should be straightforward, but could be used by opponents of the bill to stall implementation. Also, advocates need to be vigilant that the jobs created in Haiti respect the dignity and core labor rights of workers.

## **RESOURCES**

For copies of statements, visit: [www.usccb.org/sdwp/international/latinamerica/haiti.htm](http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/international/latinamerica/haiti.htm).

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