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# Regional Leaders Meet in Jamaica As Haiti Continues Descent Into Anarchy

**As armed factions overrun the capital, CARICOM and international allies discuss path forward**

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Regional leaders will meet in Jamaica on Monday for an urgent meeting aimed at addressing the situation in Haiti, which last week reached a new level of crisis as a coalition of armed gangs laid siege to various parts of the country's capital of Port au Prince.

Non-essential personnel from the United States Embassy in the city were airlifted out by U.S. Marines on Sunday, some of whom stayed behind to boost embassy security after the latest wave of fighting, which targeted Port au Prince's political quarter. Reporting on the ground indicates that the German ambassador as well as other EU officials have also fled the country as fighting intensified. Germany's foreign ministry indicated that its diplomats, currently in the Dominican

Republic, will work from there “until further notice.”

Haiti has been gripped by intense violence and instability since the 2021 assassination of sitting president Jovenel Moise, as armed gangs seized on the uncertainty and power vacuum by trying to establish violent control of increasing swathes of the capital and its surroundings. However, things took an intense turn at the end of February, when the gang coalition led by Jimmy Cherizier, a former police officer turned gang leader who has [adopted the sobriquet](#) “Barbecue”, attacked several strategic locations including police stations, prisons, hospitals, and the airport.

Thousands of prison inmates are now roaming free after the attack on two prisons in the capital on March 2, one of them the national penitentiary which reportedly housed over 4,000 people. Last Saturday, dozens of residents broke into a public building, retreating there in the belief that it would offer more safety than their homes.

The intense fighting meant that Prime Minister Ariel Henry, who had been out of the country seeking to shore up support for the deployment of Kenyan police officers in Haiti, was unable to return. His hasty flight home first attempted to land in the Dominican Republic, but was diverted to Puerto Rico after Dominican officials closed their airspace to flights into and out of Haiti.

The gangs have stated that their intention is to force Mr. Henry’s resignation. The Prime Minister, who was due to demit office in February 2022, said last January that he would remain in place until new general elections are held, which he is now promising will take place by August 2025. Although unelected, Mr. Henry remains the lone individual in the country with any hint of governing authority, having been appointed – but not confirmed – as Prime Minister shortly before Mr. Moise’s assassination. No lawmakers remain in the country’s legislature as their terms have all long expired, with no general elections having been held in Haiti in almost a decade.

While calls for Mr. Henry’s resignation began shortly after his installation as prime minister have only grown louder in recent weeks, U.S. authorities seem reluctant to add their voices to those asking the neurosurgeon to step down for the sake of the country. CARICOM leaders reportedly suggested he leave office, an option he reportedly rejected.

"We are not calling on him or pushing him to resign," said U.S. State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller last week. However, “we are urging him to expedite the transition to an empowered and inclusive governance structure.”

With the prime minister still reportedly stranded in Puerto Rico and unable to return home, violence still raging in the streets of Port au Prince, and besieged security forces seemingly hopelessly outmanned and outgunned by gangs who continue to attack vital national infrastructure and terrorize traumatized residents, it is unclear exactly how Mr. Henry – or anybody else for that matter – is expected to restore the country to some semblance of order.

On Monday, CARICOM leaders will meet with envoys from the United States, France, Canada and the United Nations to discuss options. Guyanese President Irfaan Ali, sitting chair of CARICOM, said that the meeting would examine “critical issues for the stabilization of security and the provision of urgent humanitarian assistance.”