

Haiti's Political Turmoil: Ariel Henry Steps Down Amidst Gang Pressure

Gang-led campaign forces unelected Prime Minister into de facto exile, signaling major political shift

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When they began their latest offensive against the apparatus of the Haitian state, the country's gangs had one primary stated objective: to depose unelected prime minister Ariel Henry.

"The people of Haiti must be free – and we will achieve that with our guns," promised former policeman turn gang leader, Jimmy Chérizier at the end of February, threatening civil war and mass killings if Henry did not give up his grip on power.

After having resisted calls for his ouster for almost two years, Henry was placed in de facto exile last week when his attempted return to Haiti was stymied by the gangs' attack on Port au Prince's

airport. On Monday, during a press briefing for a CARICOM-led meeting in Jamaica on the situation in Haiti, sitting CARICOM chair Irfaan Ali of Guyana announced that Mr. Henry's tenure was now over.

"We acknowledge the resignation of Prime Minister Ariel Henry," said Dr. Ali. "We are pleased to announce the commitment to a transitional governance arrangement which paves the way for a peaceful transition of power," Guyana's president told assembled journalists.

The transitional Presidential Council, which will consist of seven voting members and two non-voting observers, will have "specified presidential authorities" conferred upon it during its life, Dr. Ali said. The voting members consist of a representative from the private sector as well as from each of the major political groupings that are currently active in the country. Observers will be representatives of civil society and the interfaith community respectively, Dr. Ali noted.

In an effort to establish the council's legitimacy and independence, people who are under indictment or have been previously convicted in any jurisdiction will be excluded from membership, as will anyone currently under sanction by the United Nations, anyone who intends to contest the next general election in Haiti, or anyone who opposes UN Security Council resolution 2699, which authorized sending multinational forces into Haiti to stabilize the country's security situation.

The selection of an interim Prime Minister and Council of Ministers will be the first order of business for the transitional Presidential Council, after which begins the process of rebuilding Haiti's democratic infrastructure from scratch. A provisional electoral council must be established, as does a national security council, which is intended to oversee the deployment of the multinational security support mission in the country.

"Haitians deserve a country where children can go to school and their parents know they will be safe," said Dr. Ali, exhorting stakeholders towards co-operation, patience, and determination to execute a successful transition. "This is the only sustainable path – a future of strong democratic institutions, peaceful resolution of conflict, and security and prosperity [for] all Haitians."