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Haiti Cancels Carnival Following Violent Clashes Between Military and Police

Government / **Published On February 24, 2020 09:21 AM /**

Staff Consortium **February 24, 2020**

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Armed off-duty police officers protest over pay and working conditions, in Port-au-Prince Haiti close to the presidential palace, on February 23, 2020 By. DIEU NALIO CHERY/AP

PORT AU PRINCE, Haiti, CMC — Haiti has cancelled Carnival celebrations here following violent clashes Sunday between members of the Haitian Armed Forces (FADH) and members of the National Police of Haiti (PNH) demanding that the authorities accept the formation of the Haitian National Police (SPNH) union.

The clashes also involved persons demanding the resignation of President Jovenel Moise and members of the Haitian Armed Forces.

The clashes took place in the Champ de Mars area, in the capital where gunfire was heard most of the day.

In a statement, the government said that it was condemning “these acts of violence and acts which violate freedom and democracy”.

It questioned the rationale behind the attacks aimed at driving the country into chaos, despite the commitments and decisions of the authorities to respond to the demands of the police officers.

“Why reject dialogue and the outstretched hand to solve the difficult problems facing the homeland, choose the path of anarchy preferably and offer the population more pain and tears that such a situation will not fail to provoke,” the statement noted.

It urged people to be vigilant “in these troubled moments of national life” noting that “in any case, it cannot allow a trivial exploitation of the demands of the PNH and justify these violent actions which expose the country as much, through an alleged rejection of carnival by a certain sector of the population.

“In order to avoid the planned bloodshed, the Government takes the opportunity to inform, the population and the carnivalists in particular, that it has been decided to cancel the carnival in Port-au-Prince and invites the Haitian people to keep calm pending the next announcements,” the statement added.

On Sunday, the situation escalated into a clash between plainclothes police claiming to be from the national police union, other uniformed police and FAD’H members.

Media and eyewitnesses reported that several shots and bursts of automatic weapons were heard in the Champs de Mars area, near the National Palace, and according to unofficial reports, at least 12 people were injured, including three police officers.

But the Secretariat of the High Command of the Armed Forces of Haiti in a statement said it wanted to inform the general public “that there is no confrontation between the police force and the army, as reported” noting that “hooded individuals with firearms attacked the Grand Headquarters and tried to set it on fire”.

The statement said that soldiers on guard had to shoot into the air to have them evacuated and called on the police, who are responsible for maintaining order, to guarantee the safety and protection of the entire population.

A fire also broke out in front of Radio Télé Caraïbes, where three cars were set ablaze as demonstrators accused the station of filming them by drone and being biased in their reporting.

Carnival stands were also set on fire.

Reports from other areas in the country indicate a deteriorating situation.