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A Dozen People Dead, Numerous Homes Incinerated, and a Small Town Terrorized as Haitian Gangs Battled for Territory

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Unrest in Haiti in Oct. 2021. By. THE NEW YORK TIMES

The town of Cabaret, situated north west of Port au Prince, was the scene of slaughter on Tuesday night, as gangs descended on the community, killing everyone they could get their hands on. Cabaret's mayor, Joseph Jeanson Guillaume, told Associated Press reporters that the ad hoc guards that had been appointed to keep townspeople safe during a spike in violent gang activity were no match for the machine-gun toting gang members when they arrived.

Pictures and video of mutilated corpses strewn on the ground littered social media, and showed raging fires which consumed nearly two dozen homes.

The distraught Guillaume appealed to the country's National Police to find and punish the perpetrators of the massacre to the full extent of the law. He called for increased state security presence in the town, which according to him, was now a "lawless zone."

He also appealed to residents of Cabaret to stand in solidarity with each other, and to be careful not to become the gangs' next victims in an attempt to flee and seek refuge elsewhere.

Heavily armed gangs have been wreaking havoc in the capital city and surrounding areas since the July 2021 assassination of President Jovenel Moïse.

In September, a coalition led by notorious gang leader Jimmy Chérizier blocked the entrance to Port au Prince's main fuel port, protesting the government's reduction in fuel subsidies. The fuel blockade led to a crippling fuel shortage which then triggered shortages of other key commodities, including water - a situation that compounded a growing cholera outbreak.

In October, 15 members of the United Nations Security Council voted unanimously to impose a sanctions regime targeting those deemed responsible for fomenting instability and violence in Haiti.

Chérizier — the former policeman turned gangland boss — was among those sanctioned. His assets, and those of other targeted individuals, were frozen, with travel and arms bans imposed as well.

In November, Chérizier's gang coalition released their hold on the port, facilitating the return of economic and social activity — to some extent — to the capital.

Canada also recently announced that it was freezing the in-country assets of former Haitian Prime Minister Laurent Lamothe, Jean-Henry Céant, another former Prime Minister, and former President Michel Martelly, under whose leadership Lamothe served from 2012-2014.

Canada also imposed sanctions on Senator Ronny Célestin, former senator Hervé Fourcand and former president of the Chamber of Deputies, Gary Bodeau.

Those and others targeted by the sanctions are accused of being involved in financing and supporting criminal activities in Haiti.

Lamothe has since demanded an apology from Canada claiming innocence to the allegations.

To this date, no apology has been forthcoming.