



*The
Bahamas*

UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL

THE QUESTION CONCERNING HAITI

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Mr. President, I wish to thank you and the distinguished representatives of the nations on the Security Council for agreeing to this meeting and to air this subject which is of such major importance to our country, to the region and to this hemisphere. The Bahamas wishes to identify fully with the statement that has been delivered on behalf of CARICOM by the distinguished Foreign Minister of Jamaica, the Hon K. D. Knight. We support the Caricom statement in its entirety. Haiti is a pressing issue. As I said in another place, The Bahamas believes that this is not just about a legal obligation. The situation in Haiti presents a moral call to action.

Mr. President, it is clear that the situation in Haiti is out of control. Law and order has broken down. Haiti is the newest member of Caricom. It is difficult for us in the region to sit by idly, saying that we support legal constitutional authority, and yet when the call for help comes from a member state to support that legitimate authority, we seek to rely on legalisms which amount to inaction. That cannot be logically correct. It would seem to set a precedent that because we may consider one politician better suited than another, we dispense with our commitment to democracy. In that case, democracy and the values which follow from it then, become a matter of convenience which turns entirely on parochial concerns.

Mr. President, there are two aspects of this present situation. There is the immediate problem of the breakdown in law and order in Haiti. The Haitian Government has represented that it is unable with its existing resources to bring the matter under control. There is also the anecdotal evidence of an insurgency that claims to control half of the country. The reality is that a nation with 8 million people, no military and a police force of just over 4000 meant that governmental authority was thin on the ground in any event. It was not difficult therefore to dislodge a few policemen by coming along with superior weapons and the will to murder and pillage. There can therefore be no pride taken in the scenes of carnage and disorder that has flowed from the guns of the rebel factions.

Whatever the motives, if the international community refuses to act and to act quickly, we will be condoning a creeping attempt to overthrow the Government of Haiti by force. In that respect, there are 32 previous examples of the dislodging of Heads of state in Haiti by this means. The question the international community must ask is whether or not it is going to contribute to the repetition of that history or whether the international community is going to assist in breaking that cycle.

It would seem that logic dictates a clear choice to help stop the cycle of dislodging heads of state through regard to extra constitutional violence. So the immediate problem to be addressed is helping to restore law and order in Haiti, not next week or next month but today.

That answer is of course, deceptively simple. The fact is that in order to restore law and order, this will require someone to do it. That means nations, that means people. That means putting other nation's troops or policemen in harm's way. It may also mean supplying equipment to an undermanned and under-equipped police force. No nation wants to put its people in harm's way into a situation that is a political quagmire. The Bahamas understands that argument.

There is a need for a commonality of understanding between all parties in Haiti, if the country is to progress out of the present difficulties. The latest Caricom initiative

offers that chance, and we believe that it is imperative for all actors to agree to that plan as the way forward. The international community also allows for the fact that as the plan is executed, there may have to be changes in the plan to meet existing realities, but let us agree to a plan and stop the violence.

Let us be clear. We do not support any side in Haiti. The sovereign choices of the Haitian people as to who their leader is or will be is an entirely a decision for the Haitian people. We do not think that our country ought to pollute the debate by venturing a public opinion of that matter.

What we do know is that all countries in the hemisphere have acknowledged who presently stands as the legitimate authority in Haiti. When that legitimate authority calls for assistance, it appears to us that it must logically follow that those who can help to restore law and order ought to do so and do so now.

Mr. President, following on from the short term effort to restore law and order, there is a need for a long term effort at keeping the peace in Haiti. In many respects, the world community took its eye off the situation in Haiti in the 1990s, much too anxious to declare victory and walk away. The result is that we are back where we started. This time, we ought to recognize and accept that the long term commitment in this Council, must be to effect and promote change in Haiti.

Mr. President, there is no doubt about our obligations in this matter. We have had an opportunity to speak with all of our partners in this matter. We have supported a resolution in the Organization of American States which calls for the provision of the legal mandate for action to assist Haiti. We urge quick and decisive United Nations action so that countries who can help, including our own, can move with legal authority to provide the immediate assistance for security and then to contribute to the longer peace keeping and humanitarian effort.

Haiti and the Haitian people have a right to exist, in peaceful and quiet enjoyment of their country within secure borders. The Bahamas comes today to ask for help for the Haitian people. That as we have said is not only a legal obligation but a moral imperative.

Thank you Mr. President.