

Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Special Meeting Saving Lives: Addressing Food Security Needs of Haiti

16 June 2023

INFORMAL SUMMARY

The Economic and Social Council convened a Special Meeting on “*Saving Lives: Addressing Food Security Needs of Haiti*,” on 16 June. Organized on the proposal of the Chair of the Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Haiti (Canada), the meeting included Haitian government representatives, regional stakeholders, leaders of various UN organizations, and Member State representatives to draw international attention to and discuss solutions towards the current food insecurity and humanitarian crisis in Haiti.

The opening session featured a video message by young Haitians, statements by the President of the Economic and Social Council, the Chair of the ECOSOC Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Haiti, and the Minister of Planning and External Cooperation of Haiti. The Chair of the Community of Latin America and the Caribbean States (CELAC) the Prime Minister of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and the Prime Minister of Jamaica delivered the keynote addresses, which were followed by special messages from the Executive Director of the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Executive Director of United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF). This was followed by a panel discussion moderated by the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Rwanda to the United Nations. Panelists included the Vice-Minister of Bilateral Affairs of the Dominican Republic, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General and Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator of Haiti, the Director of Operations and Advocacy Division of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the Director of Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Liaison Office with the United Nations, the Mission Chief for Haiti of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the Country Manager for Haiti of the World Bank Group. An Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in Haiti designated by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights participated as a respondent. The Council also heard a message from the Chief Executive Officer of Food for the Poor in Haiti. Twenty-five delegations and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) shared their best practices from previous work on increasing food security in Haiti and recommendations for ways forward. A [Presidential Statement](#) was issued to capture the key ideas and recommendations from the meeting.

Speakers called on the international community to prioritize food security initiatives in Haiti and massively scale up the humanitarian response to the crisis. Nearly half of the Haitian population, 4.9 million people, are experiencing high levels of acute food insecurity, and every day someone in Haiti dies from violence, disease, or malnourishment. Half of those in need of humanitarian assistance in Haiti are unable to access it due to lack of sufficient funding and insecurity. Inaction is costing lives, therefore the international community can and must increase the support for the humanitarian response to this crisis. The 2023 Haiti Humanitarians Response Plan requires \$719 million, the largest appeal since the 2010 earthquake, in order to target the 3.2 million people out of the 5.2 million in need. This amount is more than double the amount requested in 2022, as recent flooding, landslides, and earthquakes have compounded the deteriorating situation. Rising global inflation and rising levels of violence in Haiti have resulting in increased food prices, which has also exacerbated the crisis.

As of June 20th, 2023, only 22.8 percent of the appeal has been funded, and speakers and Member States called on the international community to substantially increase contributions and fully operationalize the Humanitarian Response Plan. The WFP, which aims to reach 2.3 million Haitians in 2023 and has already reached

1.4 million this year, called on the international community to increase their financial contribution, without which 1 million Haitians will not be able to receive food assistance from the WFP. Calls were made to scale up the WFP program that provides meals to schoolchildren, such as expanding the provision of meals through schools to the greater community and extending the provision of meals through the summer months.

Participants highlighted the link between the increasing security and political crisis in Haiti and food insecurity and stressed the unique challenges posed by the nexus of economic, political, and physical insecurity for many Haitians. The country's sustained economic decline, high exposure to natural disasters, lack of investment, and surging violence have created a multifaceted humanitarian crisis, which requires a multi-pronged solution. Two million Haitians, 1.6 million of which are women and children, currently reside in areas under the control of armed groups. Widespread and increasing gang violence pose a security threat that impairs many opportunities for economic development. Women, children, and marginalized communities are particularly affected by increasing levels of violence, which has resulted in a dramatic increase in gender-based violence and sexual exploitation.

Security concerns also hinder humanitarian assistance programmes in certain parts of the country and necessitate additional logistical support, which requires further funding. Despite these challenges, leaders of humanitarian assistance programs, including WFP, UNICEF, OCHA, and FAO, redoubled on their commitment to continue to provide crucial services to those in need. While noting the severity of political and security concerns, UN System representatives and Member States were adamant about the crucial role that humanitarian programmes and development assistance would have to play in addressing the urgent needs of the country.

Haiti's crises and vulnerabilities are interconnected and require long-term sustainable solutions, which address the root causes of the crises. Throughout the special meeting, participants emphasized that the recent crises of humanitarian, political and economic dimensions were ultimately not discrete, but fundamentally linked: weak infrastructure means that the country is more susceptible to natural disasters, the lack of a stable domestic agricultural sector increases the risk of famine, and economic instability fuels cycles of violence that prevent development. Given this level of interdependence, a multi-pronged approach is needed geared towards long-term self-sustainability. Only development that actively involves local stakeholders, builds resilient infrastructure, and fosters economic opportunities for Haitians can succeed in the long run.

While Haiti has favorable agroecological conditions, the country has become increasingly reliant on food imports, currently importing more than half of its food. Investing in rural development programmes, local agricultural production capacity and infrastructure, sustainable and climate-smart practices, and connecting farmers to markets will serve to alleviate root causes of the food insecurity crisis, generate local economic opportunities, and develop long-term sustainable solutions. Given the country's large agroeconomic potential, investment in Haitian agriculture, as proposed by the Haitian Minister for External Cooperation and a multitude of other speakers, would boost long-term sustainability, and tremendously benefit millions of people in a short amount of time. In ultimately prioritizing Haitian production over imports, the international community must ensure that solutions to current crises do not cause vulnerabilities, as a lesson learned from the past. Encouraging private investment would be a further great step on the path towards sustainable agricultural development, taking away strain from government resources.

The food crisis in Haiti constitutes a violation of the right to food that requires urgent action to address the structural issues that prevent people from accessing food, including both physical and economic access. While planning how to revitalize Haitian food systems, care must be taken to provide opportunities to those most at

the margins of Haitian society, especially the rural population and women. Given the centralization of the Haitian economy in urban areas, Port-au-Prince in particular, strengthening rural communities through investment can go a long way towards reducing the extreme inequalities that permeate Haitian society. A proposal was made to scale up humanitarian assistance initiatives in rural areas to create economic opportunities outside of Haiti's cities, moving people to areas with lower levels of violence, decentralizing the population, and reducing inequality between urban and rural areas.

Women are particularly vulnerable to food insecurity, and humanitarian assistance initiatives must center around connecting them with emergency relief and involving them in long-term solutions. Women and girls are particularly vulnerable to be targeted for gender-based violence sexual exploitation during times of conflict, and violence against women in all forms has grown to staggering levels during Haiti's current conflict. Furthermore, the responsibility of providing food for the family, even when this requires entering unsafe environments, often falls to women and girls. This may also result in women being forced to trade sex for food to keep themselves and their families alive. Research shows that food aid is more likely to reach those in need when the aid is distributed through women. **Putting food aid in the hands of women** has also shown to reduce corruption and sexual exploitation. Solutions to the food insecurity crisis must center around empowering women and gender mainstreaming, particularly those working in the agricultural sector, as well as protecting them from sexual violence and exploitation.

Children in Haiti are particularly vulnerable to the humanitarian crisis in Haiti. Children are at risk of being killed walking to school. The multifaceted crises and children not being able to safely get to school and to get a meal have led to an unprecedented 30 percent increase since last year in the number of children suffering from severe wasting. Nearly one quarter of Haiti's children are chronically malnourished. In a video message presented at the meeting, young Haitians spoke of the difficulties of attending and focusing in school without enough to eat. UNICEF warned this chronic malnourishment can severely inhibit both physical and cognitive development. The food crisis is compounded by the severe cholera outbreak in Haiti, and nearly half of the suspected cases are children under fourteen. Furthermore, children are five times more likely to die of cholera when suffering from chronic malnourishment.

Solutions to the food insecurity crisis must be Haitian-led and involve sustainable investments that strengthen local production. Calls for increased support of humanitarian assistance funding and initiatives from the international community were followed by emphasis that international actors must engage with local stakeholders, including civil society organizations, and the Haitian diaspora, and ensure that responses are tailored to reflect the local experience. The humanitarian response efforts must be transparent and maintain constant dialogue with affected communities, building trust through working at a grassroots level.

Strengthening cooperation and the effectiveness of global and regional partnerships is essential for addressing Haiti's multifaceted humanitarian crisis. Many participants recognized the opportunity for fostering global South-South cooperation to assist Haiti in tackling its manifold challenges. Some Member States emphasized how their experiences with sustainable development policies can position them to develop innovative and targeted approaches. Deepening the South-South cooperation can open new pathways towards development in Haiti and benefit communities in the long term.

As the first free black nation, Haiti can be viewed as the founder of the Caribbean community of states. The leaders of CARICOM therefore recognize their special responsibility in helping their neighbor emerge from this humanitarian crisis and develop its agroeconomic potential. A meeting of the CARICOM Eminent Persons Group

with Haitian stakeholders was recently convened in Jamaica to discuss issues of governance, security, as well as the humanitarian emergence. This meeting was to be viewed as the first in a series of consultations with the Eminent Persons Group, which is planning on travelling to Haiti to continue to develop solutions with Haitians. Members of CARICOM reemphasized their solidarity and commitment to restore Haiti to prosperity and security. Beyond CARICOM, regional cooperation can also be organized through the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC).

Delegations welcomed the concerted and coordinated actions by the United Nations system and partners on the ground to support Haitian people. Within the UN system, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean can serve as a further regional forum for coordinating action on Haiti. Regional organizations and the international financial institutions, including the IMF and the World Bank, must play a transformative role in promoting community resilience to enhance food security. The IMF's approval of emergency financing "Food Shock Window" of its Rapid Credit Facility in January 2023 and the World Bank's Crisis Response Window, were highlighted. Lastly, a critical role for continuing to foster international partnerships on Haiti falls on ECOSOC, which, through its Ad Hoc Advisory Group, will continue to coordinate on how to best assist Haiti and advocate to the international community to keep Haiti high on its agenda.

In addition to the recommendations highlighted in the summary, the following recommendations and proposals were made during the meeting:

- The Minister of Planning and External Cooperation of Haiti announced their intention to launch an **investment plan** for food security.
- A call was made, echoed by various speakers, for **an international United Nations Conference on Haiti** to investigate more thoroughly root causes and solutions to Haiti's development challenges. Multiple speakers highlighted that Haiti's crises should not be viewed as isolated incidents, but rather the result of structural challenges that have made the country more vulnerable to shocks. The suggested conference on Haiti would provide the opportunity to discuss more than emergency responses to crises in Haiti and more thoroughly discuss root causes, structural issues, and solutions.
- Several Member States highlighted **prioritizing Haiti in the United Nations Security Council** in order to address Haiti's security crisis.
- Calls were made to **increase support to the Haitian National Police** to control gang violence, while a number of Member States highlighted their support to the Haitian National Police.
- Calls were made to **fund the 2023 Haiti Humanitarian Response Plan** in its entirety, and to increase funding for other initiatives. One delegation announced their intention to double its financial contributions to the donor of basket fund for Haiti in the near future.
- Calls also were made to increase **South-South cooperation** and partnerships to address the crisis. One delegation announced their plan to table a resolution on the role that **regional organizations** can play in combatting food insecurity. The role of regional organizations in addressing the food insecurity crises was highlighted. CELAC and the EU were encouraged to include and prioritize Haiti on their agendas.