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Haiti and the Reform of the Haitian National Police

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Executive Summary

After briefly documenting the history of the Haitian National Police (HNP), its origins and the plans developed to reform it, the report explores four central questions:

1. What reforms are currently being undertaken?
2. What are the impacts of these reforms?
3. What can explain these outcomes?
4. What alternative approaches could result in more sustainable and inclusive security in Haiti?

The case study focuses on the police service in Haiti, addressing the justice and penal systems only tangentially. The study is based on a thorough review of the available primary documentation, supplemented by interviews with key interlocutors in the government of Haiti, the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), the Canadian and American embassies, and a variety of men and women in the police service. As well, the researchers held discussions with two focus groups: one in Jacmel, bringing together women and providing a gender-specific perspective; the second in Cité Soleil in Port-au-Prince, bringing together a group of Haitians who are particularly vulnerable with respect to security.

Noting the challenges for national ownership posed by the unusual development of the current plan to reform the HNP, the study examines the reforms underway in **financial management, recruitment and training, vetting, police-justice links, parliamentary and civil society oversight, and promoting gender equality**.

Many of the reforms underway face challenges in two broad areas: **lack of resources/poor resource management, and governance**. The HNP faces significant shortfalls in terms of numbers of personnel, financial resources and capital – both infrastructure, such as buildings, and the tools of the trade, such as radios, vehicles and fuel. The HNP's **human resource challenges** exist on many levels, beginning with the challenge of attracting new recruits into a system where their previous education offers them no opportunity for accelerated advancement up the hierarchy. For example, all HNP officers begin at the same grade, regardless of their level of education.

Training, too, poses challenges and opportunities: while using foreign trainers has resulted in language and communication problems, the presence of these foreigners is helping to create a less politicized culture within the HNP – an important step forward in a society that has seen far too much political violence in recent years.

Resource challenges, however, extend beyond human resources; the police force struggles with poor **building maintenance** and a shortage of the “**tools of the trade**”. These resource constraints are evident from the beginning of an agent's training, as even cartridges for target practice are in severely limited supply. Essential resources like vehicles

and fuel to allow investigators to travel to crime scenes are scarce. Moreover, such resources are being poorly managed by the HNP; members of the public, for instance, often see police officers running personal errands, such as taking children to school, in police vehicles.

Reform of the governance structure of the HNP is moving at a similar pace and facing similar challenges. The study shows that the process of **vetting** current HNP staff is taking much longer than planned, is moving quite slowly, and faces **problems of coordination, transparency and accountability**. Not only does this mean that HNP officers accused of human rights violations continue to serve in the police force with impunity, but it also contributes to poor perceptions of the police force on the part of the general public.

Moreover, the police service as a whole suffers from an extremely **complex and centralized hierarchy** which hinders its effectiveness and efficiency as little decision-making authority has been delegated away from the centre. Even mundane decisions must be sent quite high up the chain of command thereby diminishing the HNP's ability to respond in a timely manner, and decreasing transparency.

These challenges to effective police governance are exacerbated by problems plaguing the security system as a whole, and the relationship among its various parts. For instance, communication between the HNP and the Judicial Police is severely restricted. **Parliamentary oversight** of the police is hamstrung by archaic and poorly-defined procedures which lead to blockages in decision-making. As well, legislation is slow to change and many of the texts explaining how a law is to be implemented do not yet exist.

Ideally, **civil society** would play a key role in advocating for change in all these areas. Some partnerships between civil society organizations and the police do exist; however, in general the relationship is tenuous at best. This is particularly true for vulnerable populations such as those Haitians living in the extremely poor neighbourhoods of Port-au-Prince.

Lastly, some recent advances have been made in the promotion of gender equality within the HNP, and in the broader justice system. However, women within the police service still face **serious sexual harassment and discrimination**. Despite targeted recruiting efforts, this situation has resulted in understandably low participation in the police service by Haitian women.

The study concludes that a **lack of coordination** among national and international stakeholders, **weak ownership** of the reform plan within the Haitian National Police, and a general resistance to public engagement (with a few exceptions) are hindering the robust implementation of the planned reforms, and the transformation of the HNP into a rights-respecting organization at the service of the Haitian people.

Recommendations in the study focus on:

- fostering improved communication among the HNP, civil society groups, and the general public, and among national and international stakeholders;
- improving the transparency of the police service, the reform plan and the vetting process;
- improving the management structures of the HNP both for human and material resources;
- prioritizing recruitment and training, and improving the training curricula; and,
- significantly improving the treatment of women within the police service to encourage greater participation of women in the HNP.