

# Haiti: Teenagers shot dead by police as post-Matthew crisis deepens

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A month after Hurricane Matthew crossed Haiti's Tiburon Peninsula with winds approaching 150 miles per hour, a 10-foot storm surge and more than 2 feet of rain in some places, the crisis left behind by the storm is deepening.

The lack of adequate relief aid has led to growing anger and protests by the Haitian people, leading to clashes with security forces that have resulted in the killing and wounding of young demonstrators.

The hurricane's official death toll, likely understated for political reasons, is 546 people. According to UN figures, nearly 100 percent of crops in the Grand'Anse department—including coconuts, bananas, coffee, chocolate and others—were destroyed. In the Sud department, where the storm made landfall, more than 90 percent of crops were ruined. Nationwide, more than 350,000 head of livestock died in the storm. As of October 28, more than 800,000 people still needed “urgent food assistance,” according to the UN.

The Haitian government is estimating total damage of nearly \$1.9 billion. Agricultural losses make up an estimated \$600 million of this amount. Damage to housing is also valued at \$600 million, with 175,000 people having lost their homes. Five hundred schools were either damaged or destroyed. More than 2 million people were affected by the storm, with 1.4 million in need of assistance. UNICEF estimates that more than 112,000 children under the age of five are at risk for acute malnutrition.

The US and European governments, whose imperialist policies have kept Haiti destitute for two centuries, have contributed only paltry amounts of aid. USAID donated \$400,000 immediately after the storm, followed by \$26 million worth of food and supplies, such as chlorine for treating water. The European Union gave €1.75 million right after the storm, with an

additional €20 million in infrastructure support announced three weeks later.

The most significant aid so far has been 820,000 doses of an oral cholera vaccine from the World Health Organization and the Pan American Health Organization. Cholera, a water-born bacterium which was brought to Haiti by UN soldiers in the fall of 2010, has sickened more than 3,000 in the areas affected by Hurricane Matthew.

Additional tropical rains on October 20 and 21 flooded for a second time some areas that had been devastated by Matthew, while also killing five people in the Nord-Ouest department. Desperation in the Sud and Grand-Anse departments is now leading to violence.

On Tuesday a teenager was shot dead by Haitian National Police in Les Cayes as people tried to take supplies from a Puerto Rican boat from which 2,500 metric tons of aid had not been unloaded for several days. Residents of the city responded with barricades of burning tires: several main roadways, including National Route 2, were blocked. *Le Nouvelliste* reported that people armed with guns and machetes were threatening the homes of local authorities. There were reports of tear gas, and a resident of Les Cayes told the paper, “We don't want to go out in the street, for fear of being counted among the victims.”

Claudy Robas, the parliamentary deputy from Cayes-Ile-à-Vache, told *Le Nouvelliste* that “the anger of the population is directed against the authorities and institutions. I was advised not to stick my nose into it, as a measure of prudence.” Joseph Astrel, the mayor's chief of staff, reported having escaped assassination.

In Torbeck, just to the west of Les Cayes, an earlier incident occurred in which a UNICEF truck carrying medical supplies was attacked and emptied. The

supplies, including kits for midwives and medications, were being delivered along the coast. UNICEF estimated that between 70 percent and 80 percent of medical facilities in the area where Matthew made landfall were either damaged or destroyed.

In the town of Dame Marie last week, a 16-year-old was killed by police and three people were wounded at a food distribution site, according to the *Latin American Herald Tribune*. People in and around Dame Marie were already in a state of desperation. A week after Matthew hit, Fox News reported on 300 patients waiting for medication to be delivered to the town's hospital. Among them was a farmer who walked seven miles with a broken leg after a tree fell on his house; because there were no painkillers available, the hospital could not even perform an amputation.

In contrast to the aftermath of the 2010 earthquake, when it dispatched more than 20,000 troops to Haiti, the US government has decided to delegate management of the current crisis to the Haitian National Police and the UN's hated MINUSTAH force. Only 400 US military personnel were dispatched after the storm, and they were withdrawn by October 18.

On October 11, the UN voted to extend MINUSTAH's mandate at current troop levels by six months, in part because it feels that the HNP is not ready to police the country without help. MINUSTAH head Sandra Honoré told the meeting that "no effort should be spared to continue strengthening the rule of law institutions and the Haitian National Police," according to the UN's published summary.

When UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon visited Les Cayes on October 15, these supposed defenders of "the rule of law" fired teargas at protesters. Video on the *Guardian's* web site shows residents who were so angry that they did not even want food from the trucks accompanying Ban.



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