

# EMBASSY

CANADA'S FOREIGN POLICY NEWSWEEKLY

Embassy, January 11th, 2006  
NEWS STORY

## Haiti's Delayed Elections Puts Extension of the UN Peacekeeping Mandate in Jeopardy

**The China-Taiwan spat could prove an obstacle in renewing the mandate of the UN Stabilization Mission In Haiti as perennial delays in holding elections are becoming the order of the day**

By Brian Adeba

The news that Haiti's national elections, set for Jan. 8, have been delayed again because of technical difficulties, has observers wondering about the fate of the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH). This is the fourth time the elections have been postponed. On Jan. 6, the UN Security Council hastily convened a meeting to discuss the situation. After the meeting, the Council issued what amounted to an ultimatum to Haiti's leaders to hold the elections by Feb. 7.

Initially created to last six months, MINUSTAH's mandate was extended last July to Feb. 15, 2006. It was hoped that by that date a new government would have been elected, had the latest round of elections taken place. Now observers are closely watching the possible scenarios that will emerge if the elections are not held on Feb. 7 and a motion is brought before the Security Council to extend the MINUSTAH mandate.

Of interest will be the move China will make if a vote to extend the MINUSTAH mandate is brought before the Council. Though it is generally believed that such a vote will pass, critics say there's always a possibility that the People's Republic will veto it. In the past, Beijing has expressed opposition to extending the mandate beyond six months.

Currently, China has contributed 125 police officers to the UN mission in Haiti, the first time it has had a military presence of sorts in the Western hemisphere. Previously, China has been reluctant in contributing active units to UN peacekeeping missions around the world. But the decision to send troops to Haiti last year surprised the international community because Haiti does not recognize China, but Taiwan, which Beijing considers a renegade province.

"They have sent invitations to the president and the prime minister to pay a visit [to Beijing] for a long time now. If Haiti declines, China has hinted it really can't support a

UN mission in a country it doesn't have diplomatic relations with," says Carlo Dade, Senior Advisor at the Ottawa-based Canadian Foundation for the Americas (FOCAL). Last summer when Haiti's interim president, Alexandre Boniface, made plans to visit Taiwan, China wasn't too amused. Realizing that this move could impede the passing of a resolution to renew the MINUSTAH mandate, the interim government in Haiti sought to decrease tension by promising that Prime Minister Gerard Latortue would visit China in the fall. Eventually, the visit to Taipei was cancelled. For 40 years, Haiti has maintained diplomatic ties with Taiwan, a fact experts say could be behind China's opposition to extending the MINUSTAH mandate last year and could as well prove to be a problem if a vote is called after Feb. 7. The People's Republic severs diplomatic ties with any country that has relations with Taipei.

But equally baffling is the fact that China has not made moves to shut Haiti off its list of countries with whom it maintains relations. In fact, it has made overtures which could be interpreted as an invitation to establish ties. For the last two years, China has maintained a token trade office in Port-au-Prince.

Grant Dawson, a post-doctoral researcher at the Centre for Security and Defence Studies at Carleton University, believes a withdrawal of the peacekeeping mission would be premature because the security situation is still unstable and could deteriorate further.

"With the current force, the security situation is only manageable," says Mr. Dawson, who also believes a resolution to extend the MINUSTAH mandate will be approved at the UN. But he also concedes a veto by China is possible. If that happens, Mr. Dawson says the UN will have to find a different approach for supporting the mission in Haiti.

During the chaos that gripped Haiti in 2004, law enforcement institutions were destroyed, hence the need for MINUSTAH's presence, says Mr. Dade, though he also agrees that Haiti is "not that dangerous." But in the event that the mandate is not renewed, the MINUSTAH forces will have to be replaced by a bilateral mission. But which countries will shoulder that responsibility remains an open question, says Mr. Dade.

"The suspects will have to be the United States and Canada," he says. "But where are we going to find the troops and where is the United States going to find the troops?"

However, Jean Saint-Vil of the Canada Haiti Network says there's no justification for MINUSTAH to be in Haiti. Mr. Saint-Vil, who views the UN mission as an occupation force, says reports of anarchy in Haiti are exaggerated. "Gang violence can not constitute a reason to have UN presence," he says, arguing that so far there have only been seven UN casualties in Haiti, four of them caused by accidents. Mr. Saint-Vil called for the withdrawal of the UN force. "There was no war when they [UN] went into Haiti," he says.

The International Crisis Group (ICG) says the security situation in Haiti remains fragile and calls for the renewal of the MINUSTAH mandate. Armed gangs with political and criminal motivations abound in urban areas, though the countryside is largely peaceful,

says Mark Schneider, Senior Vice President with the ICG in Washington D.C. But Mr. Schneider says the difficulties in holding the elections can't be shrugged off as a Haitian process, and calls for the Organization of American States to be involved. "We don't think it should be an endless process," he says.

Mr. Dade says it is important that the elections are held successfully to convince countries new to peacekeeping and with troops in MINUSTAH to participate in future missions. Twenty-one countries have contributed military personnel to MINUSTAH, eight of them from South America. "If they are not convinced of that, you will have almost no public support and questioning of the mission back home," says Mr. Dade.

[http://www.embassymag.ca/html/index.php?display=story&full\\_path=/2006/january/11/haiti/](http://www.embassymag.ca/html/index.php?display=story&full_path=/2006/january/11/haiti/)