

Déjà vu or Something New?

Lessons for Future Peacebuilding from Haiti

Rama Mani*

Abstract: This article examines the case of the MINUSTAH peace operation in Haiti with a view to drawing some observations and lessons for the future of peacebuilding in societies emerging from crisis or conflict. In setting up the MINUSTAH operation in Haiti, the UN got several things right in text-book terms and yet, it finds itself in a quagmire on the ground. The quandaries and dilemmas faced by the UN in Haiti serve to teach us some valuable lessons and point towards certain recommendations for future peacebuilding. The article recommends that the UN should find a new formula that treads the balance between trusteeship or enhanced international responsibility and diversified local ownership grounded in a broader cross-section of the local population.

Keywords: Haiti, MINUSTAH, peace support operation, peacebuilding, local ownership

1. Introduction¹

The first sign that is likely to greet the visitor arriving in Haiti's capital Port au Prince is »MINUSTAH – TOURISTA!« or »MINUSTAH – GO HOME«. The irony is that the UN has applied several of the lessons learned in recent peacebuilding and peacekeeping operations in Haiti, and this is attested by numerous recent reports and evaluations.² However, despite the actions of the UN, the reality on the ground ranges from scepticism to cynicism to outright rejection of the UN mission, with only few Haitians expressing support.

It is never easy for a UN peace operation to achieve both the objective stated in its Security Council mandate, as well as broad public appreciation of its role within the host country. Given its very nature as an »intervening force«, a UN operation is essentially contested and raises divergent expectations and strong reactions in recipient societies. MINUSTAH is no exception. Notwithstanding the disappointment, rejection or disapproval felt by Haitians in some quarters, the spiralling violence in Haiti has only been reversed since summer 2005. A measure of stability appears to have returned to the country, for which MINUSTAH could, arguably, take some credit. Yet, MINUSTAH has fallen short of expectations, even in the analysis of some of its own senior officials, and has failed to have a decisive positive impact.

The dilemmas and challenges facing MINUSTAH in Haiti are specific and *sui generis*, given the unique history of Haiti and the particularly tortuous course of its relationship with the UN over the past 14 years. Yet, these challenges are also symptomatic of the dilemmas, contradictions and challenges that face UN peacebuilding endeavours today in many parts of the globe. Haiti brings to the surface many of the crises and questions that have dogged recent UN operations in countries as diverse as Kosovo, East Timor and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The current situation of MINUSTAH in Haiti bears lessons not only for the future course of action in Haiti but also, and importantly, for future peacebuilding operations undertaken by the UN elsewhere.

This article starts by highlighting some of the actions that the UN either got right or tried to get right in Haiti, based on lessons it has learned from the past, although, unfortunately, these actions failed to have the desired effect. The article then identifies some of the main conundrums and dilemmas faced by MINUSTAH in Haiti and the lessons they could teach us. Finally, the article concludes by suggesting some recommendations for future UN peacebuilding efforts.

2. Lessons Applied but Misfired?

When confronted with the degenerating crisis and then the precipitated departure of President Aristide on 29 February 2004, the UN acted in ways that merit appreciation and credit on many counts for best practices learned and applied from past experiences in peacebuilding and complex peace operations.

Yes, the UN Security Council (UNSC) acted with both alacrity and generosity. Belying frequent accusations that it acts too slowly and inadequately, this time, the UNSC was both quick in its response and fairly generous in its allocation of ground forces. On the very day of Aristide's departure from Haiti, on 29 February 2004, the UNSC passed Resolution 1529 establishing the Multinational Interim Force and undertook to use this interim period of three months to establish a follow-on

* Dr. Rama Mani is the Director of the New Issues in Security Course and a Faculty member at the Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP). She specialises in peacebuilding, conflict prevention, justice and the rule of law and has widely published, lectured and provided policy advice on these subjects.

1 This article draws on a study mission to Haiti conducted by the author between 2-9 September 2005, jointly between GCSP and FRIDE (Spain), as well as extensive research before and since the mission. The author expresses her gratitude to the GCSP for sponsoring the joint GCSP-FRIDE study mission to Haiti, and to Jose Luis Herrero, Executive Director of FRIDE and team member, for co-sponsoring it. She also wishes to express her heartfelt gratitude to Katja Flückiger, her Academic Assistant at the GCSP, for her invaluable and perspicacious research assistance and support. For reasons of confidentiality the names of interviewees are not revealed here.

2 These include, for example: *Brahimi Report 2001*; *Kings College/Norwegian Institute of International Affairs 2005: Study on Peacekeeping-Humanitarian/Development Interface*, study commissioned by UN DPKO and UN OCHA; *King's College 2003: A Review of Peace Operations: A Case for Change*; *Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue 2003: Politics and Humanitarianism: Coherence in Crisis?*, in: HDC Report February.

UN stabilisation force.³ On cue, UNSCR 1542 of 30 April 2004 established the creation of MINUSTAH and allocated 6,700 troops and 1,622 civilian police for a country comprising eight million inhabitants.⁴

Yes, the UN learned that a key failing of recent peace operations was weak mandates, and, fittingly, MINUSTAH was given a clear and strong mandate under Chapter VII of the UN Charter in the area of establishing a 'secure and stable environment'.⁵ In doing so, the UN showed that it had learned the importance of prioritising human rights from the beginning of a peace operation, alongside security and politics.

Yes, the UN acknowledged that strong leadership of peace operations is often the decisive factor of success and that the choice of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General in Haiti is a critically important factor. Ambassador Juan Valdez of Chile was an appropriate choice for this role, given the unmitigated respect of MINUSTAH staff that he enjoys and the admiration that is bestowed upon him by the international community for his leadership skills. Also, in an innovative development, it was decided to let regional actors from Latin America lead the peacekeeping effort to develop regional solidarity.

UN leaders often state that local ownership is the linchpin of peacebuilding, and in Haiti it appeared to be following its own advice. Accordingly, UNSCR 1542 laboriously spells out that MINUSTAH's mandate requires it to work alongside and with Haitian institutions, primarily the Transitional Government and the Haitian National Police (HNP), but also with Haitian human rights institutions and groups on human rights issues. In terms of approach as well, MINUSTAH senior management recognised the need to balance security with reconciliation, and the initial intention was to focus on reconciliation among actors and to make the political process as broad and inclusive as possible. Furthermore, learning from the lessons of premature withdrawal of international actors from Haiti and other post-crisis countries in the past, the UN's senior leadership and main donors have reiterated consistently that the UN will stay in Haiti for the long haul. The UNSC has regularly extended MINUSTAH's mandates in timely fashion and in July 2005, in UNSCR 1608, stated its 'intention to renew for further periods'.⁶

With so many valuable lessons learned and applied, what then went wrong? How did this seemingly picture-perfect mission get itself into the quagmire it finds itself in today? To seek answers to these perplexing questions, it is worth investigating the new lessons Haiti raises for the attention of the international community.

³ United Nations Security Council 2004: Resolution 1529, S/RES/1529 (2004) adopted by the Security Council at its 4919th meeting, on 29 February 2004.

⁴ United Nations Security Council 2004: Resolution 1542, S/RES/1542 (2004) adopted by the Security Council at its 4961st meeting, on 30 April 2004.

⁵ United Nations Security Council 2004: Resolution 1542.

⁶ United Nations Security Council 2005: Resolution 1608, S/RES/1608 (2005) adopted by the Security Council at its 5210th meeting, on 22 June 2005.

3. Eight Dilemmas and Simple Lessons from Haiti

3.1 Troops or Police?

The UN could be commended for deploying a generous number, i.e., some 6,700 troops, to Haiti. However, a key question raised by several Haitians of diverse social and political backgrounds, and also by astute international observers, is whether the composition and structure of the mission constituted an appropriate response to the context and needs of Haiti in 2004. They observe that Haiti was neither at war, nor could it be defined as a typical post-conflict situation. According to them, there was, therefore, no need for peacekeeping forces to act as a buffer between two warring sides. The context in Haiti in 2004 was primarily one of public insecurity and gang warfare rather than rebel forces, and violent crime, including trafficking in arms and drugs. Soldiers who have been trained for warfare are ill-equipped to deal with such situations. A senior UN civilian officer demonstrated this vividly to the author in the narrow streets of a slum in the Northern town of Cap Haïtien, where it was apparent that the bulky equipment carried by the UN peacekeeper on his back made it impossible for him to move or turn around to intercept a miscreant in the narrow winding passageways of the slums, whether in Port au Prince's infamous Cité Soleil or in the provinces.⁷ Furthermore, some say that the very fact that troops were deployed may have contributed to militarising the situation and raising the stakes. When the military takes on policing operations, the distinction between defence and security becomes blurred, which leads to more coercive and military responses and undermines the national police force. Much of this violence was politically motivated and manipulated and clearly required a political response – that is, it would be erroneous to disregard the political element of this criminalised violence. Nevertheless, it was not within the ken of trained military personnel to respond. Meanwhile, UNPOL (formerly CIVPOL) was outnumbered and simply lacked sufficient numbers of police officers to take on the situation, although they did have the appropriate training and capacity to deal with the task at hand.

The lesson from Haiti, then, is that it is not enough to respond rapidly to a degenerating situation or to have sizeable contingents of military troops being deployed. Rather, given the kinds of conflicts and crises now being witnessed, with high levels of criminal and gang-style violence, the very composition of peace operations need to be adjusted. What is called for today is for a higher proportion of the civilian police forces to be trained and experienced in dealing with such situations.

3.2 Chapter VII or Chapter VI after all?

The UN Security Council acted soundly in giving MINUSTAH a clear Chapter VII mandate from the start to establish a secure and stable environment. It was also explicitly spelled out that MINUSTAH's responsibilities included the protection of

⁷ Visit to UN Regional Office in Cap Haïtien, 4-5 September 2005.

civilians. Yet, on the ground, several observed that the peace-keeping troops acted as if they were entrusted with a Chapter VI mandate: Upon arrival, after a painfully slow deployment, MINUSTAH took little visible action against the high violence, the marauding armed gangs, and the general climate of impunity. Armed elements and gangs took advantage of MINUSTAH's lax attitude. Violence, kidnappings, rapes, and insecurity spiralled out of control following MINUSTAH's deployment, reaching a peak by Spring/Summer 2005.⁸ Haitians began fleeing the capital *en masse*. Some Haitians report that they felt more insecure during this period of chaos than in any previous period in the past decade.⁹

That MINUSTAH, despite their large numbers, failed to act to protect civilians from marauding gangs and from fake or genuine Haitian National Police elements reinforced the popular perception that MINUSTAH was not there to protect Haitians but had some other agenda. It was at this time that MINUSTAH gained a reputation for being either unwilling or unable to act and that slogans like 'Minustah-Tourista' were coined.¹⁰ Rumours also spread that MINUSTAH had a vested interest in the violence, that MINUSTAH had deals with HNP, such as getting women in exchange for munitions and arms they supplied to police officers.¹¹

By April 2005, having become alarmed with reports emerging from Haiti, the UN Security Council members dispatched a mission to Haiti to investigate the situation.¹² On 22 June 2005, the UNSC issued a new resolution, UNSCR 1608, voting for a temporary increase of MINUSTAH to 7,500 troops and 1,897 civilian police, to respond to the spiralling of violence and insecurity. A total of 750 of these troops were specifically tasked to create a rapid-reaction force to provide increased security around Port au Prince. UNSCR 1608 drew particular attention to HNP reform, the vetting of police officers, and investigation of human rights abuses. This resolution had an immediate effect. MINUSTAH began to interpret its mandate more forcefully and became a more visible presence on the streets, doing joint patrols with the HNP and finally entering slums and popular poor neighbourhoods. The level of violence began to decrease in a dramatic manner. Its more forceful interventions in popular neighbourhoods have significantly raised public opinion regarding MINUSTAH.¹³ However, for many Haitians, this change has come too late. Many are unwilling to forgive MINUSTAH, or change their earlier perceptions.

The debate in international circles about whether peace operation mandates should come under Chapter VI or Chapter VII is highlighted in Haiti in the most clear-cut way possible. Upon arrival in a violent and chaotic situation like Haiti, a UN operation must act rapidly to establish its credentials, win public trust, and reduce insecurity by its deterrent presence. When peacekeepers fail to act forcefully or decisively right from the beginning of a UN mission, they are quickly judged and categorised. This perception is difficult to change subsequently, and peacekeepers are not easily forgiven for their early mistakes or failings. The clear lesson from Haiti is that what is important is not having a Chapter VII mandate, but acting upon it.

3.3 Mentor or Accomplice?

UNSCR 1542 was quite clear regarding MINUSTAH's responsibilities *vis-à-vis* the Haitian National Police (HNP). It called on MINUSTAH, under Chapter VII,

»to assist the Transitional Government in monitoring, restructuring, and reforming the Haitian National Police, consistent with democratic policing standards, including through the vetting and certification of its personnel, advising on its re-organisation, and training, including gender training, as well as monitoring/mentoring members of the Haitian National Police«.¹⁴

Yet, MINUSTAH appeared to only take to heart the very last part of this mandate, that of mentoring members of the HNP. No reform plan was elaborated. No systematic vetting was undertaken until the June 2005 UNSCR 1603. Routine joint patrols were not operated. Instead, the public perceived MINUSTAH to be associated with the HNP and viewed MINUSTAH members as passive bystanders if not accomplices in their looting, trafficking and violations of human rights. Persons claiming to work for the HNP were known to enter neighbourhoods, particularly those where pro-Aristide Lavalas supporters were thought to be found, and their patrols traditionally ended with summary executions.¹⁵ Although alarmed, in the early months MINUSTAH did not pursue any visible investigation of these executions and seemed incapable of stopping police violations.

This was a flawed strategy, as the unequivocal consensus in 2004-2005 was that the HNP was one of the main sources of insecurity in Haiti.¹⁶ Yet, instead of condemning and controlling the HNP's violations, MINUSTAH was seen to be protecting and mentoring the police. Sadly, the case of the HNP is a flagrant illustration of the failure of previous international assistance and intervention. The HNP was newly created on Aristide's return from exile in 1994, under the vigilant eye and training of the international community. Some observers

⁸ *Bohning, Don* 2005: Haiti: UN Mission Unable to Establish Order, in: *Miami Herald*, 26 May 2005, available at <http://www.globalpolicy.org/security/issues/haiti/2005/0526missionmandate.htm>, accessed 25 October 2005; *Harvard Centre for Human Rights* 2005: Keeping the Peace in Haiti? Harvard, Massachusetts, March 2005.

⁹ Interviews and casual conversations with Haitians from different sectors, Port au Prince, 2-8 September 2005.

¹⁰ An example of the negative perception of Haitians is evident in: *Haiti Information Project* 2004: The UN in Haiti: Part of the Problem, Not the Solution. *Haiti Progress*, 23(25), 1 September 2004, available at <http://www.globalpolicy.org/security/issues/haiti/2005/0830problem.htm>, accessed 25 October 2005.

¹¹ Interviews with Haitians from different sectors.

¹² *United Nations Security Council* 2005: Report of the Security Council mission to Haiti, 13 to 16 April 2005, S/2005/302, 6 May 2005; *Kyriakou, Niko* 2005: UN Urged to Step Up Peacekeeping, Reconstruction Efforts, Inter Press Service, 15 May 2005, available at <http://ipsnews.net/interna.asp>.

¹³ *Lynch, Colum* 2005: UN Peacekeeping More Assertive, Creating Risk for Civilians, in: *Washington Post*, 15 August 2005, page A10.

¹⁴ *United Nations Security Council* 2004: Resolution 1542.

¹⁵ *Delva, Joseph Guyler* 2005: UN to Investigate Haiti Slum Lynchings, *Reuters*, 24 August 2005, available at <http://www.globalpolicy.org/security/issues/haiti/2005/0824investigation.htm>; Interviews with human rights and police officers of MINUSTAH in Port au Prince.

¹⁶ *Lindsey, Reed* 2005: Police terror sweeps across Haiti, *The Observer*, 31 October 2004, available at <http://observer.guardian.co.uk/international/story/0,,1340274,00.html>, accessed 31 October 2005.

called the HNP a qualified success, notwithstanding considerable obstacles, in 1998-99.¹⁷ Yet, despite vetting procedures established in the early stages of its existence, the HNP was quickly infiltrated by elements of the disbanded abusive *Forces Armées d'Haiti* (FADH) and became discredited. Observers today note that the HNP is a mixed bag. It is partly politically manipulated and partly simply corrupt and criminal.

After UNSCR 1602, MINUSTAH, having become aware of the extent of the damage being caused, began to insist that HNP only go out on patrol accompanied by MINUSTAH, so as to reduce cases of police abuse and violations. It also finally drew up a clear plan for vetting members of the HNP and for thorough reform. MINUSTAH's human rights unit also set up an investigative unit and began investigating cases of violations more strenuously. But again, as in the previous case, these changes may be too late. Yet, success in radically reforming the HNP and transforming them from a force of abuse and corruption to one of protection will be the crux of achieving any degree of stabilisation in Haiti.

The lesson from Haiti is that dealing with crime and insecurity, and hence with national law enforcement agencies, is of utmost importance. Any indication of UN complicity with the agents causing insecurity and impunity discredits the UN and is very difficult to turn around or undo later on. Further, creating a strong, credible, reliable and independent police force is a central element in peacebuilding. It is essential to build a country's capacity to take care of its own law and order concerns.

3.4 Inclusion or Impunity?

The UN's adherence to impartiality and inclusion, laudable in theory, has exacted a high price in Haiti. In an effort to soften the intransigence of opposition forces and of the Transitional Government towards Lavalas, the party of Aristide, MINUSTAH attempted to encourage the political inclusion of Lavalas. MINUSTAH insisted that all political actors who eschewed violence be legitimately included in the political process. Since Lavalas members and factions did not resort to violence, they too should be included. This followed UNSCR 1576 of 29 November 2004, which explicitly stated that the Transitional Government should »continue to actively explore all possible ways to include in the democratic and electoral process those who currently remain outside the transition process but have rejected violence«. MINUSTAH therefore offered protection during Lavalas rallies when requested to do so, and they had a guarantee that the rallies would be peaceful. It also offered protection to certain Lavalas members who were targeted for reprisal. When possible, it tried to limit police reprisals against Lavalas strongholds or members. It is not surprising that the greatest supporters of MINUSTAH among Haitians are mem-

bers of Lavalas, who claim that »without MINUSTAH, Lavalas would have been liquidated«.¹⁸

However, in the deeply politicised and polarised situation in Haiti, any means adopted by MINUSTAH to show itself to be apolitical and impartial, and equally inclusive of Lavalas, was interpreted by some Haitians as condoning impunity. Some Haitian human rights activists who had campaigned against Aristide accuse MINUSTAH of »siding with the butchers and penalising the victims«. In the view of one women's activist, »the biggest failure of MINUSTAH is its complacency in the face of impunity«.¹⁹

Clearly, the problem in Haiti was both one of political *naïveté* and of poor communication and a lack of explanation of MINUSTAH's strategy. As will be seen later, this lack of communication, and consequently of understanding among Haitians, must be checked urgently in Haiti and in most UN peacebuilding missions.

3.5 Restoring the Military or the *status quo ante*?

In 1994, when Aristide returned to power from exile, he took the arbitrary decision to abolish the FADH, whose members were feared by the local population due to the many abuses of power they committed. Longstanding observers at that time applauded this move as contributing to enhanced security and even noted that this abolition was »the single greatest reason for optimism about the endurance of democracy in Haiti«.²⁰ Ironically, it was a ragtag group of this disbanded FADH, organised under Guy Philippe, who finally tilted the balance against Aristide and precipitated his departure. These forces remain a major and unresolved factor today, with Guy Philippe presenting himself as a candidate in the presidential elections, and demands by former security forces to reconstitute the disbanded Haitian Army.

A legitimate question today is whether a country can ensure its security without armed forces. Many would argue that Haiti has a legitimate need for an army; they would also point out that this is required in the constitution. Aristide's disbanding of the armed forces is recognised as being unconstitutional. Regardless of this constitutional requirement and security-based arguments for an army, caution must be exercised in the way it is created, so that past mistakes are not repeated, as was most recently painfully experienced with the recreated HNP. Despite early vetting procedures specifically designed to avoid infiltration of the police by the disbanded army or security forces, the HNP was quickly penetrated. It should be noted that the most vociferous proponents of reconstituting the army are the political elite who removed Aristide, many of whom have close ties with the old Duvalier regime and with the military elite. They speak from vested interest and do not solely have the nations' interests at heart.

¹⁷ Ziegler, Melissa/Nield, Rachel 2002: From Peace to Government. Police Reform and the International Community, Washington, D.C., Washington Office for Latin America; Mobekk, Eirin 2001: International Involvement in Restructuring and Creating Security Forces: The Case of Haiti. *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, 12(3), pp. 97-114; National Coalition for Haitian Rights 1998: Can Haiti's Police Reforms be Sustained?. In: *Haiti Insight Online*, 8(1), January 1998.

¹⁸ This point was reiterated in interviews with Lavalas leaders in Port au Prince and Cap Haitien, 2-8 September 2005.

¹⁹ Interviews with Haitian human rights activist and with feminist activist, Port au Prince, 2-8 September 2005.

²⁰ Nield, Rachel 2005: Policing Haiti: Preliminary Assessment of the New Civilian Security Force, Washington Office for Latin America.

It should also be noted that the well-organised feminist movement and women's organisations are strongly opposed to the reconstitution of the armed forces. They argue that creating a new army will only increase the number of arms in circulation and lead to further violations of human rights and new cycles of violence against women. As one feminist activist put it, »in a society as violent and ›macho‹ (patriarchal) as Haiti, an army will only increase violence«.²¹

Following elections, a national consultation and debate may be required to decide on the fate of the armed forces. While the final decision ought to lie with the Haitians, and not be imposed by the international community, every means should be taken to ensure that this debate is inclusive and not restricted to the political elite, who may try to influence the decision. If the Haitians take the decision to reconstitute the army, ensuring that old elements of the FADH who are known to have committed crimes and violations are not allowed to infiltrate the army (as they did with the HNP) will be essential. A genuinely new and legitimate army should be created uniquely for the defence of Haiti's national interests and not to protect any political party or tendency. The lesson from Haiti is not to fall into generalities and adopt the same approach to security sector reform (SSR) in different countries, but to pay careful attention to the specific political context in determining the need for, the composition of, and the process of generating and training a nation's armed forces.²²

3.6 Security or Development?

The mobilisation to oust Aristide was broad and widespread. Although Haitians recognise that it was Aristide, not the opposition or the rebels, who requested an international presence for his own preservation, many welcomed the arrival of MINUSTAH to help reduce chaos and disorder. Yet, Haitians now wonder out loud whether this security comes at too high a price for this impoverished country. Some attempts to promote public awareness by the UN have led to the public at large being informed of the cost of this mission (about USD 500 million per year), which, whilst it is not quite the most expensive endeavour undertaken, is one that represents a monumental cost for a country steeped in misery. When the Haitian population sees daily evidence of the cost of this mission alongside the near-invisible hand of development and reconstruction aid, they feel that money is being »squandered« on peacekeeping. When asked, Haitians have a varied list of priorities for MINUSTAH attention and international funds: infrastructure, employment, institutions, and education. They fear that somehow the peace operation will lead to them getting further into debt and to less money being made available for these vital needs.²³

The lesson is that there is a need to reduce the cost of UN operations, to be transparent about what those costs are, and

to explain the opportunity costs of peacekeeping and peacebuilding to the local population. Communication about the mandate and mission of peace operations is a crucial factor.

3.7 Trusteeship or Local Ownership?

The UN needs to decide on the very nature of its relationship with the government and institutions of a state that has been in quasi-collapse for decades. In such situations, should the UN acknowledge the vacuum of power, legitimacy and efficacy of such states and take an authoritative stand, providing governance and direction itself, as it sought to do in Kosovo? Or rather, in keeping with recent analyses and lessons learned from UN missions, should it recognise that the lack of meaningful local participation and ownership of the process was often the cause of a lack of sustainability or a debacle; therefore, should it put the local community in the driving seat, while it plays the role of facilitator and supporter of the process?

In Haiti, this problem is particularly acute as the extended absence of either national political will or capacity has led to an absent government since the Duvalier era. It was the total lack of willingness on the part of the Aristide government that led to the gradual withdrawal of the international donor community from Haiti in the late 1990s. In such a situation, the need for strong international leadership, if not trusteeship, seems logical and self evident to avoid the debacle of the past. Yet, Haitians, as citizens of a proud nation founded upon the first successful slave rebellion in 1804 and with a rich, albeit turbulent, history, are deeply distrustful of foreign occupation and interference in their country's sovereign affairs. Thus, they reject any international support that resembles occupation or external imposition and resent »being taught a lesson like little children«, which is how they feel with the UN today.²⁴

Haiti finds itself in a tight situation now. A wide range of Haitians would concur that the Transitional Government has been a severe disappointment, and that the hopes and expectations of the population have not been met. Furthermore, the Transitional Government has been bitterly opposed to reconciliation, has targeted opposition parties, especially Lavalas, and is clearly not paving the way for a smooth and inclusive transition to democracy. Clearly, it is incumbent on the MINUSTAH leadership to act forcefully to avoid another calamity and relapse into conflict and chaos; yet MINUSTAH must tread with caution to avoid being seen, as it already is by many, as an occupying force that is giving the orders to the national authorities.

The lesson from Haiti is that in weak, failing or collapsed states, the UN must take on greater responsibility and adopt a guardianship role in order to avoid painful and costly relapse into conflict. The UN and its member states should do so unabashedly. However, the UN should proceed from the start in a manner that inspires broad trust within the recipient country's population, so that its efforts are not perceived as a form of imperialism or occupation. For this, the UN and donors

21 Interview with feminist civil society activist, Port au Prince, 6 September 2005.

22 See Bryden, Alan/Hänggi, Heiner 2005: Reforming and Reconstructing the Security Sector, in: Bryden, Alan/Hänggi, Heiner (eds), Security Governance in Post-Conflict Peacebuilding, Münster, pp. 23-43.

23 Interviews with diverse Haitians, 2-8 September 2005.

24 Interview with civil society leader, Port au Prince, 7 September 2005.

should develop relations with, and invest in, not just the political elite who dominate the scene during and immediately after conflict, but a wider range of local stakeholders including, in particular, academics, business, media, and women's groups. In Haiti, it is these actors who are more genuinely motivated by the future of their country rather than their personal interests and who will be able to lend credibility to the UN and guide it in the right direction.

3.8 Security or Reconciliation?

The senior leadership of MINUSTAH came in with a clear idea that both security on the one hand and reconciliation and longer-term consolidation of peace on the other would be pursued in tandem. However, as some senior leaders admit ruefully today, events got the better of them as violence and insecurity spiralled out of control; security dominated the agenda, ruling out any meaningful investment in reconciliation.²⁵ While they focused on security, political events on the ground continued, positions hardened, the Transitional Government began its witch hunt of Lavalas members, the PNH acted with impunity, and MINUSTAH began to lose its bearings. Today, the UN finds itself largely ruled out of any dialogue process. Positions have hardened, and there is no meaningful reconciliation. Rather, the transitional government has become even more hard-line in its position against Lavalas and any association with Aristide, even while it has provided shelter to known former human rights violators who committed grave crimes during the Cedras and Duvalier regimes.²⁶

The lesson is that volatility and uncertainty are constant albeit unpredictable in post-conflict situations. Therefore, an attitude of waiting till improved security will permit investment in longer-term reconciliation and consolidation is ill placed. However difficult, the two must be pursued together because they reinforce each other.

25 Interview with senior MINUSTAH civilian management, 7 September 2005.

26 Amnesty International Haiti 2005: Disarmament delayed, justice denied, in: AMR 36/005/2005, 28 July 2005; Harvard Human Rights Group 2005.

4. Recommendations

Based on the observations and lessons emerging from Haiti, a few recommendations could be drawn for future UN and international practice in post-conflict peacebuilding, and especially for the new Peacebuilding Commission. These are:

- A new mechanism and approach must be devised that treads the balance between trusteeship and local ownership.
- A new composition of UN missions must be envisaged and prepared for, with more police and less military components, in situations with high levels of public disorder and criminalised political violence.
- The UN needs to plan innovatively and strategically to make peace operations far more cost effective but with tangible impact on people's lives, through, for example, early investment in infrastructure, rule of law, employment, etc..
- The perception that peacebuilding and peace operations only benefit the rich and do nothing for the poor must be erased, through, for example, international development actors making the reduction of social, economic and political inequalities a core objective alongside economic growth and investment.
- »Local ownership« should not be restricted to domination of political parties and economic elites but should include a much broader swathe of the local public.
- While SSR is critically important, it must be pursued in a manner that is sensitive to the context and gives special emphasis to the governance aspect.
- Every UN mission must engage in broad and constant communication of its core mandate and of its daily interpretation of its mandate in its operations to all sectors of the population.
- Above all, a balance is needed at all stages between short-term security and long-term consolidation or between negative and positive peace – both have to be pursued in parallel.