

Haiti: Dissatisfaction Growing with the Martelly-Lamothe Government

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In recent months, demonstrations have erupted in different parts of Haiti demanding electricity, river dredging, road and bridge construction, support for farmers, and the building of schools and hospitals.

The people of Rivière Grise, a neighborhood located in the capital's vast slum of Cité Soleil, demonstrated last week to demand that the river be cleaned of garbage and debris as the danger of flooding approaches with the summer hurricane season.

On Jun. 5, residents of the lower Artibonite Valley blocked National Highway # 1 (which runs between Port-au-Prince and Haiti's North) at Pierre-Payen, Périsse, Carrefour-Peille, Bois-neuf, Liancourt, and Pont-Sondé to demand electricity, among other things. Demonstrators used trucks to barricade the road at various points, turning back vehicles travelling along it.

Meanwhile, one of the five E's of President Michel Martelly and Prime Minister Laurent Lamothe is supposed to be energy. Nevertheless, various parts of the capital are mostly plunged into darkness. Only five or six hours of electricity are provided in some places. Lamothe announced at the beginning of 2013 that within six months, Port-au-Prince would have electricity 24 hours a day. The government has clearly not fulfilled this promise, among many others. As the hurricane season begins, some 320,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) remain homeless after the Jan. 12, 2010 earthquake three and a half years ago. This figure includes, according to the latest count, 166,158 women and 153,893 men still living in tents in 385 camps scattered around the capital and its vicinity. Some 22% of IDPs live in 86 camps that are very vulnerable to natural disasters including floods and landslides. This also puts them at greater risk for the spread of diseases such as cholera and H1N1 avian flu. More than three years after the earthquake, some 73,000 Haitians are threatened with forced evictions, while some 1.5 million Haitians are living in food insecurity.



Demonstrations like this one demanding government action are multiplying across Haiti.

In Parliament's last two Finance Laws for Fiscal Years 2011-2012 and 2012-2013, lawmakers budgeted 10 million gourdes (\$231,414) for each of the country's communes (counties). But with only four months remaining until the end of fiscal year 2012-2013, these laws have not been implemented in several municipalities. The executive instead has used these funds to bargain with and corrupt some unscrupulous parliamentarians.

When summoned to testify before the Senate on Jun. 4, Prime Minister Lamothe said that his government had released about 15 billion gourdes (\$347.12 million) after Hurricane Sandy last autumn to solve urgent problems, almost 13 billion gourdes of it from funds provided by Venezuela's PetroCaribe deal.

So although 15 billion gourdes have been released during the first half of 2013, most peoples' needs are still not met, and demonstrations are increasing. Prime Minister Lamothe was unable to present a clear report on how these disbursed funds have been administered. Senate President Simon Dieusel Desras stopped a no-confidence vote against Lamothe's government on Jun. 4, but, if popular ire continues to rise, the Senate can be expected to organize another no-confidence vote soon that will determine the future of Lamothe's government.

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