

# Haiti: High School Teachers Strike, Demanding Several Months of Unpaid Salaries

High School Students Are Again in the Streets

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Across Haiti, thousands of students have taken to the streets to demand that teachers return to their classrooms. Teachers in turn are demanding several months of unpaid salaries. Many teachers also want employment letters which they still lack after years in the classroom. Of the 10,000 teachers working in the public sector, 3,000 do not have employment letters and have not been paid.

About two months after the start of the school year, public high schools are not functioning normally, and their students are demonstrating in the streets. This will adversely effect children's education around Haiti.

Teachers of the Teachers' Collective of the North and North-East are protesting against the daily deterioration of their living and working conditions. They have worked since October 2011 without receiving a penny, they say. These teachers were part of the Free and Compulsory Universal Schooling Program (PSUGO), which supposedly provided "free education" constantly trumpeted by President Michel Martelly. Teachers have closed the doors of the School District Office (BDS) in different districts of the North and Northeast departments, particularly in the town of Acul-du-Nord.

In Petit Goâve, several thousand students have also been protesting against the henchman of pro-Martelly deputy Jacques Stevenson Thimoléon. The regime agents have tried to take education hostage by assaulting the directors of public schools.

"We are not in politics! We are not in the opposition! We just say no to the politicization of Faustin Soulouque High School!" the young demonstrators chanted.

The students also called for the arrest of a man close to Deputy Thimoléon who they say arrested one of their teachers. "We want teachers to teach courses," said one student. "We need an education."

The demonstrating high school students blocked traffic on some streets in Petit Goâve in an effort to close other schools since the high school is not functioning. The Faustin Soulouque High School there has not opened since the start of the school year on Sep. 8. Teachers there have been on strike since a student's parent, close to Mr. Thimoléon, insulted the school's director.

At high schools in downtown Port-au-Prince, in Delmas 75, in La Saline, and at the Georges and Antoine Izméry High School near the capital's Petite Place Cazeau neighborhood, among

others, students have been demonstrating for their teachers to return to their classrooms.

With the appointment of Nesmy Manigat as the Minister of National Education and Vocational Training in April, the PSUGO program was closed, without any accounting for the hundreds of millions of dollars collected for it through an illegal \$1.50 tax on every international money transfer and five cents per minute for every international phone call since 2011. Many charge that, instead of going to fund education, this revenue has gone to enrich Martelly's clique, bribe deputies in the Parliament's pro-Martelly block, and fund extravagant regime propaganda.

Although PSUGO has ended, the taxes on transfers and phone calls continues, still without transparency or accounting.

The school principals hired by the PSUGO were once again in front of the gates of the Education Ministry on Nov. 3 to demand their due. Meanwhile, Minister Manigat has closed schools for a week without any clear explanation.

In his statement to the international press during his visit to France, Martelly spoke of free education several times, but the reality is something else. The schools are still dysfunctional.

Martelly's biggest lie is that he brought free education to Haiti. For many decades, the Haitian state has provided free education throughout Haiti through public high schools, municipal, community, and national schools, as well as the State University of Haiti (UEH). In fact, most of those in power today obtained free education in Haiti's public schools and UEH. Under the Haitian Constitution of 1987, Articles 32: "The State guarantees the right to education. It sees to the physical, intellectual, moral, professional, social and civic training of the population. Education is the responsibility of the State and its territorial divisions. They must make schooling available to all, free of charge, and ensure that public and private sector teachers are properly trained. The first responsibility of the State and its territorial divisions is education of the masses, which is the only way the country can be developed. The State shall encourage and facilitate private enterprise in this field. Primary schooling is compulsory under penalties to be prescribed by law. Classroom facilities and teaching materials shall be provided by the State to elementary school students free of charge. Agricultural, vocational, cooperative and technical training is a fundamental responsibility of the State and its communes. Higher education shall be open to all, on an equal basis, according to merit...."

So it is a patently false when Martelly pretends that he was the first to bring free, universal education to Haiti.

Over 400 schools were enrolled in the PSUGO. Nonetheless, some [78% of Haitian students failed their state exams](#) earlier this year. This dismal result speaks volumes about the concrete effectiveness of Martelly's touted education campaign.

Meanwhile, many striking teachers are angry at Josué Mériilien, the formerly radical and outspoken leader of the National Union of Haitian Normaliens (UNNOH). Recently the Education Ministry provided him with a 30-seat minibus and hired some of his relatives. Many striking teachers now question whether Mr. Mériilien has been bought off.

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