



**LA COMPAGNIE DE JÉSUS (LES JÉSUITES)  
PROVINCE DU CANADA  
TERRITOIRE D'HAÏTI**

**POSITION PAPER OF THE JÉSUITES OF HAITI ON THE  
CURRENT HAITIAN CRISIS**

**INTRODUCTION**

The severe crisis that has affected Haitian society for several decades has now reached unimaginable dimensions. It feels as though we are living in total chaos, at the bottom of an abyss with no prospect of escape. Uncertainty and suffering seem to have taken away all hope. Our nation is slowly collapsing, and with it our institutions and the fundamental values on which our common life depends. This tragic situation challenges us as men and women, as Christians, and even more so as Jesuits. The Apostle Paul's cry is more than ever in our minds and hearts and urges us to action: "Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel" (1 Cor 9:16).

**I. THE REASONS FOR OUR COMMITMENT TO SERVE HAITIAN SOCIETY**

We have just celebrated Christmas, the mystery of the Incarnation. Our God, the creator of the universe, burst into human history to open us to the experience of transcendence and hope. The prophet Isaiah describes the coming of the messiah as the inauguration of a new earth and a renewed humanity that makes possible new familial relationships between human beings and between humanity and all creation (Is 11:1–10). Jesus understood his mission as given by the Father with whom he remained in constant communion (Jn 10:30). The experience of Jesus reveals God's solidarity with humanity, especially with suffering humanity. It opens up new horizons by revealing the values of sharing and empathy (Mk 10:46ff; Mt 14:13–36). The ultimate goal of his mission lies in the fulfillment of each and every human being.

The mission that we receive from Christ today requires the radical task of incarnating these values every day in the challenging reality of our world and amidst the suffering people of Haiti. In the meditation on the Incarnation in the *Spiritual Exercises*, St. Ignatius of Loyola evokes the Father's empathy for the human race in its diversity and misery and his decision to send his Son into the world to save it (*Spiritual Exercises* 102). Pope Francis, for his part, urgently reminds us: "For to you is born this day a Saviour' (Lk 2:11). For me, for you." (Homily at Christmas Eve Mass 2020).

Faithful to this mission, in full communion with Pope Francis and our bishops of Haiti who, in their recent messages, repeatedly denounce and draw attention to the gravity of the current crisis (Christmas Message 2020, Bishops of the Haitian Episcopal Conference), in solidarity with our brothers and sisters of other religious traditions, with all our Haitian brothers and sisters of good will, and with our suffering people of Haiti, we, the Jesuits of Haiti, together with our collaborators, offer this statement in response to the crisis.



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## **II. SOME DIMENSIONS OF THE CRISIS**

### **2.1. A serious, far-reaching social crisis**

The crisis that faces Haitian society is by no means a simple economic crisis. It is a severe and far-reaching social crisis that affects all levels and spheres of society. It undermines the fundamental organizational structures of our society and threatens the very existence of the state. With great distress, we are witnessing the collapse of public institutions, especially representative institutions, the trivialization of the core values that make it possible to live together, and the loss of ethical guidelines, which translates into outright disrespect for others. Our country is becoming a country at risk, where insecurity has taken on staggering dimensions: the proliferation of armed gangs, kidnappings, murders etc. All this is often carried out with the complicity of the highest state authorities and due to the indifference and, at times, the impotence of the Haitian National Police. The Haitian Episcopal Conference (HEC), in its Christmas Message of 2020 (#3), denounces these serious threats that undermine the social order: violence, poverty, insalubrity, acts of rape, murder, barbarism, etc.

### **2.2. A political crisis**

The current crisis is also political, which can be seen in the total loss of credibility of politics and politicians, as well as in widespread public deficits and noncompliance with state budgets. Political leaders exhibit a certain laziness that is evidenced by a lack of courage, creativity, vision, and foresight. Complacency and “business as usual” predominate. We are seeing a questioning of the rights and values of private property, and the proliferation and strengthening of networks engaged in corruption, drugs, and human trafficking. The state is increasingly losing control of armed groups and of larger and larger portions of the national territory.

We live under the constant threat of a return to dictatorship, with an Executive that governs by decree and often in defiance of the constitution, and with the unfortunate appearance of notorious bandits and criminals—some of whom are even said to be wanted by the police within the political and media arenas. This toxic political climate has unfolded against a backdrop of serious social problems: a widespread and disturbing deterioration in living conditions, the loss of human and financial capital (about 84 percent of high school graduates have left the country in recent years), the glaring lack of human resources in every social sector, and the growing phenomenon of social and economic exiles.

### **2.3. An economic crisis**

The overall crisis within our society has a substantial economic dimension that is illustrated by a decrease in production in every sector of the national economy and the fall of the real gross domestic product (GDP). The latter amounted to US\$9.6 billion, or US\$854 per capita for the year 2019. It remains insignificant compared to that of the Dominican Republic, which amounted to US\$75 billion during the same period. More than 60 percent of the country’s population lives below the absolute poverty line. The



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vast majority of Haitians are unable to access basic social services, including education. The rural exodus is in full swing; peasants travel in large numbers to the city every day in search of employment that unfortunately does not exist.

We have seen an accumulation of trade and budget deficits in recent years, the misappropriation of public funds, and the institutionalization of corruption, etc. The country currently imports almost everything: technology, food products (meat, fish, milk), cars, medicines, textiles, etc. As a result, there is a growing discrepancy in the balance of payments, with its many negative consequences at both the micro- and macroeconomic levels.

#### **2.4. A constitutional crisis**

One expression of this widespread social crisis has been the constitutional dimension, which is illustrated by the constant violations of the country's fundamental charter by both national and international political stakeholders. On the national level, we have observed arbitrary arrests, the illegal dismissal of judges, and the outright abolition of the constitution in June 1988, by endorsing foreign occupation of the national territory. More recently, the Executive has issued a series of decrees, a practice that is not recognized by the constitution and is part of the dictatorial methods reminiscent of the grim period of the Duvalier dictatorship. Citizens are losing confidence in their political institutions, especially in the electoral institution. This could lead to new popular uprisings. In short, this constitutional crisis is rooted in an even more serious and fundamental phenomenon: the very perversion of the rule of law and the ineffectiveness of the law itself.

#### **2.5. Some fundamental causes of the crisis**

The reasons behind this grave crisis are numerous and include the following factors:

- ✚ The glaring social inequalities and the immense gap that separates those who have everything and those—the vast majority—who barely manage to survive. “Two nations in one nation” was the phrase used by the Haitian writer and politician Louis Joseph Janvier in the nineteenth century (Louis J. Janvier, *Les Constitutions d'Haïti*).
- ✚ The absence of public policies for the inclusion of citizens and a dependent mentality that is tolerated and encouraged even by the elites
- ✚ A lack of empathy and civic awareness that is becoming the dominant culture
- ✚ The accumulation of social injustices over several centuries and our disregard for fundamental values such as solidarity, respect for life and the environment, the promotion of the common good, going beyond oneself, etc.
- ✚ Missed opportunities for a stable transfer of power as reflected in interminable transitions and ongoing political crises
- ✚ Our many cultural flaws such as arrogance, selfishness, a lack of generosity, and a vengeful mentality
- ✚ The poor management of our relationships with the international community



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## **2.6. Our wealth, even in the midst of adversity**

This distressing situation risks overshadowing our many riches that can be important assets in any effort to overcome the crisis and set the country on the path to recovery. Haiti has immense natural and cultural potential, including a rich and unexploited subsoil, more than 1,700 kilometers of coastline, many historical and natural sites that are among the richest in the region, a young population, a diaspora of more than two million people, and significant professional resources. In addition, a grassroots movement is beginning, which consists of many social organizations, human rights organizations, some media entities, political parties, etc., which, despite its limitations, remains a bearer of hope in the process of building democracy and establishing the rule of law in the country.

## **III. IS THERE A WAY OUT?**

We are certain that this situation neither represents inevitable doom nor is it the fruit of mere coincidence. It is the result of human action. Therefore, there are always possible ways out. There is reason to hope that our nation can be reborn through a deep collective awareness and determination on the part of all its citizens in response to the many challenges we face and grounded in the genuine potential that exists.

- ✚ It is time to create a true civic movement that aims to promote love of country, civic engagement, selflessness, respect for life, promotion of the common good, and a sense of volunteerism—especially among young people—in support of good causes in the social and political fields.
- ✚ There is an urgent need to promote a genuine return to fundamental spiritual values such as love of others and empathy; in short, a spiritual rebirth that will serve as the basis for action in the socioeconomic, political, cultural, and other fields.
- ✚ It is essential to create opportunities for economic growth based on investment in the production of goods and services in order to reduce mass unemployment, which dehumanizes, reinforces inequalities, and is at the root of many ills in our society.
- ✚ It is time to embark on a real process to modernize society, focusing on inclusion and offering quality education to all without exception.
- ✚ It is necessary to decentralize the country and go beyond the “republic” of Port-au-Prince, as stipulated in the 1987 Constitution, for greater administrative and economic inclusion, and finally to launch the country on the path of sustainable development.
- ✚ It is important to engage all religious authorities in the process of Haiti’s rebirth in order to overcome the divisions between religions and allow healthy collaboration (among Catholics, Protestants, Vodooists, etc.) in the social field, for the greater good of the nation.



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**CONCLUSION/APPEAL**

If the current crisis is a consequence of human action, a way out of the crisis and a better tomorrow can come about through the positive action of the sons and daughters of our country.

- ✚ We urge key national and international actors to take the appropriate decisions, in strict compliance with fundamental democratic principles, to help save this country.
- ✚ We urge the active forces of the country to stand up as our country faces this historic crossroads, repeat the action of 1804, and thus launch a comprehensive movement of national rebirth that will restore hope and dignity to our people.
- ✚ We also urge all social and political activists, the many organizations of the Haitian diaspora, not to lose heart but to continue the struggle to overcome this unbearable situation.
- ✚ We urge the brave and resilient people of Haiti, a proud people even in the face of adversity, to continue to draw from their faith, their rich culture, and their unique history, new reasons for hope and the courage to bring to reality their dream of a new Haiti.

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