INTERNATIONAL FELLOWSHIP OF RECONCILIATION (IFOR) and
CONSCIENCE AND PEACE TAX INTERNATIONAL (CPTI)

Submission to the 110th Session of the Human Rights Committee for the attention of the Country Report Task Force on HAITI

(Military service, conscientious objection and related issues)


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Basic Information

Population (November 2012, estimated\(^1\)) 9,802,000

Conscription

Minimum recruitment age\(^2\): 18

Manpower reaching “militarily significant age” in 20103: 115,246

There are no active armed forces, only a paramilitary coastguard with approximately 50 personnel. Accordingly no figure is given for military expenditure.

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\(^1\) Source: The Military Balance 2013 (International Institute of Strategic Studies, London), which bases its estimate on “demographic statistics taken from the US Census Bureau”.

\(^2\) Source: Child Soldiers International (formerly Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers), Louder than words: an agenda for action to end state use of child soldiers. London, September 2012.

\(^3\) Source: CIA World Factbook. https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html. The CIA defines “militarily significant age” as 16. However its estimates have not been updated since 2010 and therefore relate to the cohort of the male population reaching 19 (a more common recruitment age in most countries) in 2013. This figure is more meaningful than total population in assessing the comparative impact of military recruitment in different countries.
Haiti’s armed forces were demobilised in September 1994 following the overthrow by a multi-national force acting in the name of the UN of the government which had taken power in a military coup in 1991, and the restoration of the elected President Aristide. In April 1995, they were officially disbanded. Unfortunately, these moves do not appear to have been accompanied by a comprehensive disarmament programme, and Haiti was subsequently plagued by a diversity of armed groups, those comprised of former soldiers, prison escapees and street gangs often confronting the more overtly political FRAPH (*Front pour l’avancement et le progres d’Haiti*), which included many veterans of the *tontons macoutes* and other militias of the Duvalier years – and with the pro-government *chimères*.

In 2001, the first UN intervention in Haiti came to an end; in 2004 the government was overthrown in an armed insurrection, and Security Council Resolution 1529 established the “multinational stabilisation mission in Haiti”, or MINUSTAH, which has remained in place ever since. In 2005, the transitional government agreed to pay US$2.8m as back pay for the previous decade to former members of the armed forces, who then left the bases they had been occupying in various parts of the country, but were still not disarmed.4

“Following his election in 2011, President Martelly asked international donors for US$95m to fund a new 3,500-strong army. Mindful of the history of armed forces in Haiti, it is anticipated that this might start with the creation of an engineering unit...“5 The urgency of this appeal has however been widely questioned, given that Haiti does not face any obvious external security threats. An 11,000-strong UN-trained police force (which includes a small paramilitary coastguard) should be ready to take responsibility for internal security whenever the MINUSTAH mission comes to an end. The foreign minister of Brazil, which heads MINUSTAH, has sought assurances that a new Haitian defence force would not be used “as a personal militia”; Brazil has undertaken to train 1,500 members of the potential force, but this may be as engineers; in September 2013, forty-one military engineers returned from training in Ecuador.6 This repeated emphasis on the engineering function calls into question why an explicitly military body should be seen as necessary.

In the region, Haiti currently joins Costa Rica and Panama in having no army, although not micro-states. Perhaps it might be encouraged to follow the other two in permanently renouncing armed forces?

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