



Militarization of Aid

“The first response [has been] a military response. It is a militarization of humanitarian aid. Today there are 32,000 foreign soldiers in the country, and I don’t think we need 32,000 soldiers to distribute humanitarian aid.”

- *Camille Chalmers, Director of the Haitian Platform for Alternative Development, February 8, 2010*

BACKGROUND

In the immediate aftermath of the January 12th earthquake in Haiti, the United States and Canada deployed approximately 22,000 forces to help with emergency relief. U.S. and Canadian forces provided crucial logistical support, clearing roads, expanding the runway and repairing the port. UN troops were increased from approximately 9,000 before the earthquake to over 13,000.

MCC’s Haitian partners are wary of the presence of foreign troops in Haiti for a number of reasons, including the fear that ordinary Haitians will be criminalized, that national sovereignty will be undermined, and the belief that - contrary to media portrayal of the situation - the level of insecurity does not warrant a military presence. Indeed, Haiti is no stranger to foreign military intervention. The U.S. has militarily intervened in the country three times over the course of Haiti’s history and the Canadian military was involved in the international force that preceded the current United Nations Peacekeeping Mission, MINUSTAH.

The military presence in Haiti has lacked clarity in terms of mission, rules of engagement, and length of stay.

Based upon MCC’s observations of the use of military personnel in Haiti and other countries, the militarization of disaster relief and foreign aid raises serious concerns. For example, the military is not as effective as professional relief and development organizations in delivering assistance to the people who need it the most. Blurring the lines between the provision of security and relief and development efforts can lead communities to distrust and fear non-military aid workers.

TODAY

In recent weeks both the U.S. and Canada have begun to reduce their troop levels:

- As of the first week of March, there were approximately 6,500 U.S. military personnel deployed in Haiti. U.S. Ambassador to Haiti Kenneth Merton has stated that American troops will stay in the country to assist with recovery.
- As of the third week of March, there were approximately 400 Canadian military personnel still in Haiti. The Canadian government has announced that it will continue to withdraw forces as part of wrapping up the planned 30-60 day emergency relief mandate, but it will continue to participate in the United Nations Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) and will be sending additional police units to Haiti.

Ongoing concerns regarding MINUSTAH include numerous human rights abuses that have been perpetrated by soldiers, a lack of legitimacy in that the mission’s presence violates Article 139 of the Haitian Constitution, the military component which authorizes the use of force, and a lack of clarity with regards to the humanitarian component of the mission.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

I will grant peace in the land and no-one will make you afraid.

— *Leviticus 26:6*

“What we’re asking of other people - Canadians, Americans - is to put pressure and reorient the way their governments give aid. To take another path, a path that will truly help the Haitian people.”

- *Nixon Boumba, MCC Haiti advocacy worker*

Take action by contacting your Member of Congress or Parliament to thank them for beginning troop withdrawals. Also, ask for the following:

1. Clearly articulate and define the role of the military as strictly short-term relief and humanitarian support. MCC’s partners have indicated that poor coordination and the lack of clarity with regard to the mandate of our nations’ military contingents give the impression that these forces are effectively occupying Haiti. The U.S. and Canadian governments should collaborate with the United Nations and not inhibit relief efforts.
2. Clearly define and publicize the rules of engagement for U.S., Canadian, and UN troops and police units on Haitian soil. To avoid criminalizing Haitians, personnel should refrain from carrying assault rifles in public. The Haitian National Police should be given the lead in providing security.
3. Clarify the United Nation’s post-earthquake peacekeeping mandate in Haiti, particularly with regards to the provision of humanitarian aid.

HOW?

- In the U.S., go to <http://washington.mcc.org/congress> to find your Member of Congress. In Canada, go to <http://www.parl.gc.ca/common/index.asp?Language=E> to find your Member of Parliament. Write them a letter, call, or visit to share your views.
- Send a letter to the editor of your local newspaper.
- Pray for wisdom in the halls of power as policy-makers determine how to continue responding to the situation in Haiti.
- Use this information sheet to explain the situation to family, friends, or your church community and encourage them to use their voices for positive change in Haiti.

RESOURCES

- See “The Militarization of Aid: MCC Partners Respond” at [youtube.com/watch?v=gZCkxPRN0Bw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gZCkxPRN0Bw)
- See the MCC Haiti Advocacy Guide for background information on MINUSTAH
- For more information, contact MCC Haiti Advocacy Coordinator, Alexis Erkert Depp: alexiserkert@haiti.mcc.org
- To sign up for action alerts related to Haiti, visit washington.mcc.org/alerts or ottawa.mcc.org/haiti