

# [***New leaders take on Haiti's chaos as those living in fear demand swift solutions to gang violence***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BWK-VHT1-JC5B-G30R-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti — It has been only a day since the [*transitional presidential council was installed in Haiti*](https://apnews.com/article/haiti-transitional-council-members-cfc792b231cd245fa704e4bcc86beb81), and the list of demands on the Caribbean nation's new leaders is rapidly growing. Haitians want security, food, jobs — and they want them now.

The members of the council, [*tasked with with bringing political stability to Haiti*](https://apnews.com/article/haiti-gangs-violence-142c57f868c5f8b0cdf01627b3f5350b), are under immense pressure to produce quick results, despite a deep-seated crisis that has been years in the making.

Making Haiti safer is a priority. More than 2,500 people were killed or injured from January to March alone, and more than 90,000 have fled the capital of Port-au-Prince so far this year amid relentless gang violence.

“The task is really monumental,” said Robert Fatton, a Haitian ***politics*** expert at the University of Virginia.

Gangs have burned police stations, opened fire on the main international airport that has been closed since early March, and stormed the country’s two biggest prisons, releasing more than 4,000 inmates.

Gangs now control 80% of Port-au-Prince, and though they have long depended on powerful politicians and the country’s economic elite for their survival, they are increasingly becoming self-sufficient.

“How you extricate yourself from that is very complicated,” Fatton said. “I don’t expect he presidential council to come up with a solution.”

However, the council could push for disarmament and find ways to ease poverty in the slums, he added. “Those gangs are simply not going to go away by simply saying, ‘We want you to be nice guys’.”

The nine-member council acknowledged the challenges it faces after [*it was sworn in early Thursday*](https://apnews.com/video/haiti-port-au-prince-ariel-henry-violence-13afa814516048f4947d5b969cd) at the National Palace, located in an area in downtown Port-au-Prince that has been under attack by gangs in recent weeks.

Gunfire erupted during the ceremony as some officials looked around the room. Hours later, the new interim prime minister, Michel Boisvert, addressed the council.

“The task ahead is daunting,” Boisvert said. “I would like to draw your attention to the fact that the population expects a lot from you ... everything becomes a priority alongside security.”

How exactly the council plans to tackle the daunting tasks is unclear. Its members have met behind closed doors with top government officials as they prepare to choose a new prime minister, a Cabinet and a provisional electoral commission. They will also establish a national security council.

However, no strategy to quell gang violence has been publicly announced. Several council members did not return messages seeking comment on Friday.

After the swearing-in ceremony, curious pedestrians slowed down as they passed by the building of the prime minister’s office.

Some were openly displeased. “Thieves and gangs! That’s all they are!” yelled a man as he drove past on his motorcycle.

There wasn't much hope at a crowded makeshift shelter set up at Haiti’s former Ministry of Communications — a building the government had abandoned due to gang violence.

Rose Hippolite, 66, was forced to flee her Port-au-Prince home with her four children after gangs raided their neighborhood. They have now spent two months in the yard of the ministry building, sleeping on the ground or sitting in a corner when it rains, waiting for the ground to dry out.

Gunshots ring out every day across the city. “We live in fear,” she said. “Only God knows if the new leaders will help.”

Nancy Philemon, a 42-year-old mother of six children, sat under a large and tattered umbrella nearby, selling candy and other small items to shelter refugees.

“I don’t have any hope,” she said. “Instead of things getting better, they are getting worse. ... There is no safe place anywhere.”

Haiti’s National Police remains largely overwhelmed by gangs that are better armed and have more resources. More than 15 officers have been killed by gangs so far this year.

Lionel Lazarre, general coordinator for the SYNAPOHA police union, told The Associated Press over the phone on Friday that the council must prioritize security “above everything."

Police need so much, he said, including combat helicopters, armed vehicles, drones, high-caliber weapons and infrared thermal imaging for nighttime operations.

“It is important to us that the council meet with us urgently,” Lazarre said. “I believe if there is political will, we have hope things can change.”

There is hope because for the past three weeks, police have managed to prevent gangs from taking over the National Palace and multiple police stations, he said.

Fatton, the Haitian expert, said he heard predictions on the radio about how the council is doomed to fail “if things don’t change with the security situation."

“They have a very short period of time to get their act together and get results,” he said.

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