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Prospects for Haiti's New Government

Summary

- Elevation of Haiti's planning minister to the post of prime minister offers the prospect for continuity in development policies and programs that were identified at the international donors conference held in April 2009.
- Greater attention to rural and community development and to police and judicial reform is essential in assisting Haiti to meet poverty alleviation and economic growth goals and to consolidate gains in security.
- The new prime minister will be challenged by Haiti's array of deeply-rooted problems and by the ticking clock of President Rene Preval's final year in office. The new government will have to move quickly to institute reforms before political maneuvering related to the presidential election takes over.
- Immediate, robust international engagement in Haiti's current electoral process is critically required following a decision by the provisional election commission to ban several political parties.

“Positive developments achieved during the term of President Preval contribute to the prospect for progress toward stability and growth. Still, many difficult challenges must be addressed for Haiti to achieve poverty reduction and economic security.”

Prime Ministerial Transition and Challenges

On November 10, the Haitian parliament confirmed Jean-Max Bellerive as Haiti's sixth prime minister since 2004, following the 14-month tenure of Michele Pierre-Louis. Bellerive, who previously served as minister of Planning and External Cooperation, has vowed to attract more investment and create jobs as Haiti attempts to weather the global recession and lay the foundations for sustainable development. The ouster of Prime Minister Michele Pierre-Louis by the Haitian Senate in October surprised many in view of her status as a development expert with longstanding ties to President Preval and close relations with international donors. The swift confirmation of her successor, Jean-Max Bellerive, also surprised many, in view of the protracted and conflicted confirmation process that followed the 2008 ouster of Prime Minister Jacques-Edouard Alexis.

From an international perspective, a key concern with the transition centered on prospects for continuity, particularly related to the new paradigm of greater partnership that emanated from the April 2009 donors conference in Washington. Those concerns were allayed by the fact that the new prime minister was previously instrumental in developing the plan for Haiti's development adopted by the donors conference. Additionally, the new 18-member cabinet includes 11 ministers from the previous government. Subcabinet officials and the technicians and staff implementing programs apparently will also remain in place.

The new prime minister's ability to move the development agenda forward is assisted by his apparently good relationship with parliament, which, as a result of the 2009 Senate elections, is now fully manned. The fact that Haiti's parliament has already passed this year's budget also bodes well. Bellerive benefits from a benign 2009 hurricane season and a slight upturn in economic growth. This has occurred thanks to investments in recovery from 2008's storms, as well as heightened attention from donors and private investors – as evidenced by the creation of 15,000 jobs under the auspices of the H.O.P.E. II legislation and by United Nations Special Envoy Bill Clinton's recent well-subscribed investor mission to Haiti.

Prime Minister Bellerive's ability to move Haiti's development agenda forward will be challenged, however, by the country's poverty, inequality, environmental vulnerabilities, weak political institutions and rudimentary infrastructure. It will also be troubled by disconnects between international donor agendas and Haiti's own poverty reduction and economic growth strategy and the slow pace of aid disbursements. Greater alignment of internationally financed projects with national development policies and coordination among actors would help in this regard. The new prime minister will need to enhance his government's ability to absorb and use funds efficiently and effectively. With Rene Preval entering his final year in office and political jockeying underway, Bellerive is fighting the political clock and the distractions of a zero sum gain political culture. Prospects for continuity between presidential administrations are clouded by this aspect of Haiti's political reality.

Challenges and Opportunities

The Bellerive's government's overarching challenge is to transform Haiti from a 'non-developmental state' into a developed nation. Greater attention to rural areas is an important part of that effort. Although 60 percent of Haitians live in rural areas, investment in the rural economy has been neglected for years, leading to the demise of rural economies, off-the-land migration and the 'slumification' of major cities. Investment in agro-industrial enterprises will assist the country's peasantry to transition from subsistence farmers into more prosperous rural stakeholders. Investments in bio-fuel and improved agricultural productivity should be considered as part of this equation.

Also important is support to community-driven development projects where local residents, in conjunction with their elected leaders, identify priorities, implement solutions, and create associations and working relationships that hold each other accountable. More attention must be given to local institutional and human resource development. Education and training must also be emphasized. Support for enhanced public education throughout Haiti is critical, as is supporting the improvement of Haiti's post-secondary educational system for training technicians and managers in all fields, including agro-industrial enterprises, manufacturing, and public sector positions.

Haiti's transformation will also depend on the consolidation of improvements in its security. With assistance from the U.N. Stabilization Mission in Haiti, the Haitian National Police (HNP) has earned increasing respect from the Haitian populace. Kidnappings, homicides and reported crimes are down. Problematic, however, is the fact that lynching has increased, with 87 reported cases in 2009. This indicates that judicial reform has not kept pace with police reform. Dysfunctional courts have caused frustrated citizens to take justice into their own hands. The improvement of public safety depends on effective judicial institutions and improvement in the protection of human rights.

Elections on the Horizon

Internationally recognized free and fair presidential elections in February 2011 are key to the realization of essential reforms and needed investments in Haiti. The country's political landscape

ABOUT THIS BRIEF

This report is based on a December 10 panel presentation that was co-sponsored by the USIP Haiti Working Group and the Inter-American Dialogue to discuss opportunities and constraints facing Haiti's new government. The panel consisted of Alix Cantave, associate director of the William Monroe Trotter Institute, University of Massachusetts, Boston; Daniel Erikson, senior associate for U.S. policy and director of Caribbean programs at the Inter-American Dialogue; Nathalie Liautaud, senior program manager for Caribbean programs at the Pan American Development Foundation; and, Mark Schneider, senior vice president of the International Crisis Group. Dr. Robert Maguire, associate professor at Trinity Washington University and chairman of USIP's Haiti Working Group, served as moderator.

is characterized by a cacophony of actors representing 55 registered political 'parties.' It is an evolving political landscape, however, with new parties and alliances emerging – including Preval's Inite (Unity) coalition, and old ones, including Fanmi Lavalas, splintering or fading. The key to successful elections is that decisions made by electoral authorities concerning the approval or exclusion of candidates and parties are seen as credible and consistent with Haitian law.

International involvement in Haiti increases during election periods. This will be the case in 2010 when Haiti will hold elections for the lower house of parliament, one-third of the Senate and for all district and municipal offices. Low voter turnout, disputed results, and pre-election and post-election instability have plagued past elections. A challenge before the international community is to act now to help to avoid these outcomes. Engagement to support the presence of international and domestic monitors, for example, not just on the day of the vote, but throughout the campaign, is essential. To date, that level of engagement appears weak or lacking.

Conclusion

Haiti's prime ministerial transition appears to have gone smoothly. The new prime minister is at the helm and has begun to lead his government, composed principally of members of the previous government, along a path that affords continuity in programs and personnel. Positive developments achieved during the term of President Preval contribute to the prospect for progress toward stability and growth. Still, many difficult challenges must be addressed for Haiti to achieve poverty reduction and economic security. The government is working against the political clock as the country enters into an intense and highly competitive political season. In sum, Haiti's future remains tenuous.



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