

Haiti

Flash Analysis and Prediction

1 December 2021



Release of two abducted missionaries merely serves to highlight ongoing kidnap threat and further deterioration in security environment

- Two of the 12 US and Canadian missionaries kidnapped on the outskirts of Port-au-Prince on 16 October have been freed.
- It is **LIKELY** that an initial ransom was paid - despite official US policy not to do so - although the two may well also have been suffering from health issues that undermined their usefulness as live hostages.
- The payment is **LIKELY** to have been far lower than the USD1 million initially demanded.
- The wider security situation continues to deteriorate with the temporary lifting of the G9 gang's blockade of the main fuel terminal merely serving to underline their growing power and the government's impotency.



Analysis

Two of the twelve missionaries (and five child dependents, sixteen Americans and one Canadian) kidnapped on 16 October on the outskirts of the capital Port-au-Prince, have been released. The group they worked for, the Ohio-based Christian Aid Ministries, issued a statement on 21 November saying it could not give the names of those released, why they were freed, or any other information. This suggests that some kind of initial ransom was **LIKELY** paid, with the two initial releases part of the process of the gang providing 'proof-of-life'.

Neither the Police Nationale d'Haiti (PNH), the US Embassy, nor the FBI has shared any information, but this is usual in such circumstances and even if the case is safely resolved the full details of any talks will not be made public by Washington for many years, if ever, given the longstanding US policy of not paying ransoms. It is probable that the two freed had underlying health conditions that the gang holding them – 400 Mawozo - could not adequately manage, leading them to fear that the hostages may either die or suffer irreversible health complications. Although this may be portrayed as a humanitarian gesture, it is **MORE LIKELY** that the leaders of 400 Mawozo simply feared that deaths would negate their ability to get a ransom and could even trigger US military involvement against them. The payment is therefore **LIKELY** to have been far lower than the USD 1 million per hostage initially demanded, particularly given that it will almost certainly have been paid from money raised by Christian Aid Ministries and the hostages' families.

The wider security environment also continues to deteriorate. This situation has been further compounded by severe fuel shortages caused by another criminal gang – the G9 - blockading the country's main fuel distribution terminal to the extent that, on 19 November, Canada announced that it was pulling all but essential personnel from its embassy. On 11 November, the US government urged Americans to leave Haiti due to the deepening insecurity. The G9's leader Jimmy Chérizier announced a one-week "truce", lifting his fuel blockade on 19 November, but that merely serves to underline his growing power in Haiti, and the government's impotency when faced with gangs like the G9 and 400 Mawozo.

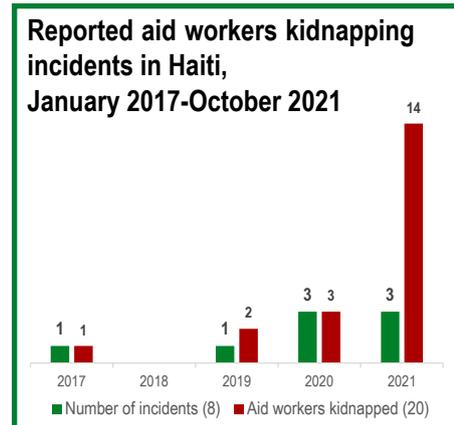


Please see our report 'Gangs and the Haitian state' for in-depth analysis on gangs and their areas of operations. Available in **English** and **French**.

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Aid Workers Kidnapped in Haiti, January 2017 to October 2021

- Monitoring by Insecurity Insight identified eight kidnapping incidents directly affecting aid organisations involving 20 aid workers between January 2017 and October 2021.
- Most kidnappings involved one aid worker, the exception being the October 2021 kidnapping of the 12 US and Canadian missionaries.
- In all incidents, the perpetrators are described as 'armed gunmen' or 'criminals'.



Locations of aid worker kidnappings

- Most kidnappings took place in Port-au-Prince; others in Croix des Bouquets.
- Reported kidnappings were carried out in road ambushes as aid workers travelled between home and places of work. These incidents always affected a single individual:
 - In August 2021, a Haitian female aid worker was kidnapped by armed perpetrators whilst on her way to work in Croix-des-Bouquets.
 - In March 2021, a Haitian male aid worker employed by an INGO was kidnapped whilst travelling in the Port-au-Prince area.
- Other kidnappings occurred in the context of project site visits by donors or other supporters. These incidents always targeted or affected more than one aid worker:
 - The North American missionaries were reportedly returning on Route 8 from the area of Ganthier after having visited an orphanage when they were stopped by heavily armed men who had set up roadblocks in La Tremblay 17 near the Boen crossroads.
 - In March 2019, a NGO driver and staff member - both nationals - were reported missing after gunmen armed with AK-47s attacked a WASH project in Boutin, east of Croix-des-Bouquets during a visit to the site by the Chilean Ambassador to Haiti. Two other staff members sustained gunshot injuries in the attack.

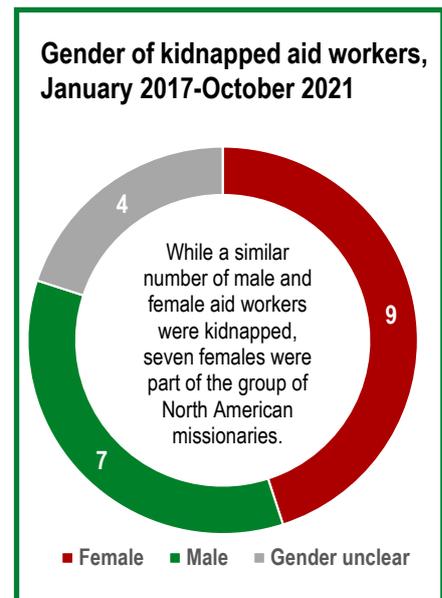
Length of time hostages held captive

- The vast majority of victims were released unharmed after a short period of two to three days. However, two of the missionaries were released after about a month with the others still kept hostage at time of publication.
- According to our monitoring, there have been no confirmed reports of aid workers in Haiti being killed while held in captivity.
- In most cases, there is no confirmed information whether ransom was paid.
 - In February 2020, a Haitian driver kidnapped by motorcycle-borne gunmen, paid his own ransom with the money he carried at the time.
 - In June 2020, a Haitian staff member escaped his abductors after being ambushed on a road near Port-au-Prince.

DOWNLOAD DATA ON AID WORKERS KIDNAPPED IN HAITI

Kidnapped aid workers profiles

- In most cases, the kidnap victims worked for NGOs. Since 2017, we only have one record of a UN worker being kidnapped.
- A similar number of female and male aid workers were kidnapped. However, seven of the nine females were part of the group of North American missionaries.
 - In February 2020, a French female UN staff member was kidnapped in Port au Prince and held for two days.
 - In August 2021, a Haitian female aid worker was kidnapped by armed perpetrators in Croix-des-Bouquets. As a result of the attack, the NGO closed all of their institutions in Haiti except for a hospital A&E department until the victim was released on 28 August 2021.



- While 13 of the 20 kidnapped aid workers were internationals, 12 of these were part of the group of abducted missionaries and one was a French UN worker.
- Among NGOs, all abducted staff were Haitian nationals.
- Kidnappers target foreigners when there is a particular opportunity, presumably because of a perceived higher ransom value. However, on a daily basis, Haitian staff are at a much higher risk of being stopped by potential kidnappers.



An aid worker is defined as an individual employed by or attached to a UN, an international or national non-governmental organisation (NGO), or government aid agency that provides food, health, education or protection services for vulnerable people.



Prediction

- The kidnapping of the North American missionaries is a reminder of the extreme kidnap risk in Haiti at present, particularly the parts of Port-au-Prince and Croix-des-Bouquets controlled by gangs.
- It should also be noted that the vast majority of all abductions affect Haitian citizens. Among those abducted are locals, so the threat is at least as **HIGH** for locally employed Haitian staff as for foreign nationals (although they are a more attractive target as larger ransoms can generally be obtained).
- INGOs will be a particular target given their access to funds from abroad and their perceived ability to influence diplomatic pressure on the key political and security actors in Haiti.
- President Biden ruled out any US military intervention after the 07 July killing of President Jovenel Moïse and this position is **UNLIKELY** to change unless the situation deteriorates to the extent that US diplomatic facilities have to be evacuated under fire.



Mitigation

- Maintain relations with gangs where possible and seek mediation with gangs if required.
- Consider opening offices outside of Port-au-Prince.
- Allow staff to work from home to reduce travel through town.
- Vary routes where possible, particularly when leaving Port-au-Prince for areas outside the capital, so as not to set a predictable pattern that would allow hostile actors to plan and prepare ambushes/attacks.
- Try to maintain a low visual profile. Obvious INGO/aid vehicles have been targeted. Do not organise high profile donor or media visits to projects at the moment.
- Ensure all deployed staff are covered by kidnap and ransom insurance and the appropriate supporting packages. Update proof-of-life questions.
- Carry effective communications equipment (and alternative back-up means of communication) as well as covert trackers and panic alarms.
- Ensure adequate trauma first aid packs are carried and staff trained in their use.

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