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# RI BULLETIN

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## **Haiti: Brazilian Troops in MINUSTAH must intervene to stop violence**

Within Haiti, despite the presence of a well-equipped, well organized peacekeeping operation, armed groups are committing violence against civilians with impunity. These “spoilers” --- armed groups who are not organized fighting units --- seek to destroy the peace process through violence to instill fear and create disorder. The UN peacekeeping operation in Haiti, MINUSTAH, especially the Brazilian contingent that leads it, is not adequately dealing with these groups.

In the past, UN peacekeeping operations have had a poor record dealing with spoilers because of insufficient or unclear mandates, or inability of troops to fulfill the mandate. MINUSTAH is operating in Haiti under a Chapter VII mandate, which gives them the authority to “ensure a secure and stable environment within which the constitutional and political process in Haiti can take place” and to “protect civilians under imminent threat of physical violence.” MINUSTAH military officials have no complaints about their mandate. Further, the various military contingents of MINUSTAH, primarily from Latin America, are professional military forces that are clearly capable of fulfilling their mandate. A Brazilian military officer told Refugees International, “We have the firepower to do whatever we need to do.”

Most violence against civilians is concentrated in the capital city of Port-au-Prince, the Brazilian area of responsibility. In the dangerous neighborhoods of Cité du Soleil and Bel Air, residents told RI that they liked the Brazilians, saying that unlike the Haitian National Police, the Brazilians “do not come in shooting, but investigate first.” The Brazilians have been “bringing peace to the people” by engaging in activities welcomed by the community such as removing trash, providing health care, and distributing food.

Though the MINUSTAH Force Commander, Brazilian General Augusto Heleno Ribeiro Pereira, stated that Brazilian operations in Bel Air have enhanced security, Haitian human rights groups disagree. “Even though we are human rights activists and a friend of the people, we cannot yet go into Bel Air,” complained one group. “We would only be able to go in there in tanks, like the Brazilians.” Meanwhile, the Brazilian presence in Cité du Soleil is minimal. “We want to see MINUSTAH come on foot,” said a woman in Cité du Soleil, “They come and run around in cars, and when there is shooting they drive away in their cars leaving us here alone.”

“The Brazilians don’t seem like they want to get too involved,” complained a staff member of one international NGO. General Heleno admitted that the Brazilian troops could probably improve their presence, but pointed to injuries sustained operating in dangerous areas. “We should have more foot patrols in these areas but it is not easy because they can shoot us from the roofs. However, when we have needed to be robust, we have been.” U.S. government officials acknowledged the tough tactical situation, but told RI, “We want to see the Brazilians out of their cars and in the neighborhoods. Cité du Soleil and Bel Air are symbolic places. Haitians need to see that the UN can provide them with peace.”

With an adequate mandate and the capacity to implement, why are the Brazilian contingents of MINUSTAH not dealing aggressively with spoilers? Political will seems to be one problem. Brazil’s government is facing serious political pressure, with many Brazilians opposed to the country’s role in Haiti. The Brazilian parliament’s approval of participation in MINUSTAH was torturous, and the media maintain a constant barrage of criticism against the deployment. These factors may negatively impact decision making, drawing lines around what General Heleno is able to do.

Brazil's approach to peacekeeping is another problem. The Brazilians appear to be following a traditional model of peacekeeping in which the primary task of peacekeepers is to ensure that warring parties are kept apart, while maintaining strict neutrality. In its analysis of peacekeeping failures, the UN's Panel on UN Peace Operations, chaired by Lakhdar Brahimi, recognized that unchecked violence was a major contributing factor to the failure of UN peacekeeping. In today's operations, which often involve working in environments plagued by violence perpetrated by irregular armed groups, peacekeepers must not only be prepared to use force to defend themselves or civilians in immediate danger, but must also seek out and stop spoilers, using deadly force if necessary.

The government of Brazil does not seem to agree with this precept. Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva has said that "Brazil's approach is better than using guns and bombs." General Heleno told RI, "We are not an occupation force...we refuse to use blind violence. We are a force for peace. This country is so small that we cannot make big moves that might disrupt the peace process." RI believes, however, that the situation in Haiti demands a more assertive form of peacekeeping.

Assertive peacekeeping is taking place in Haiti outside Port-au-Prince. In Cap Haitien, the Chilean battalion was omnipresent, conducting vehicle and foot patrols, guarding intersections and directing traffic. These activities continued after dark. The Chileans garnered praise from local human rights activists who said, "The UN provides security for us here. If they weren't here, there would be problems. They are doing a better job in Cap Haitian than in Port-au-Prince." Sri Lankan troops, whose area of responsibility abuts that of Brazil, have established numerous posts to monitor traffic and guard various installations. They were also omnipresent along the highway to Petit Goave.

Ironically, MINUSTAH can look to the U.S.-led Multinational Force (MF) that was in Haiti from March to June 2004 for both inspiration and blame. While Haitians have been hostile to past U.S.-led "invasions," many look back fondly on the aggressive actions of the MF. "When the U.S. was here, they showed the gangs who was boss. They would give us help. Now we only want peace in our neighborhood and we don't know who to run to for help." The MF was able to bring a measure of stability to Cité du Soleil and Bel Air due to aggressive action, but the MF's withdrawal before MINUSTAH was fully deployed allowed violence to take root. MINUSTAH has been playing catch-up ever since.

To stop violence in Port-au-Prince, Brazil must be more assertive. With Haiti lacking a credible national police force, MINUSTAH is the only organization that can bring a measure of peace and stability crucial for political changes to take place. By accepting the position of lead nation in a Chapter VII peacekeeping mission, the Government of Brazil has accepted the responsibility of protecting the people of Haiti. It is critical that Brazil, as lead nation, be willing to tolerate the use of force to subdue spoilers to the peace. If the Government of Brazil is unable or unwilling to allow its military to stop spoilers, another nation should be designated to lead MINUSTAH.

Therefore, Refugees International recommends that:

- The Government of Brazil allow its troops to use deadly force, if necessary, to stop those who commit violence with impunity in Haiti.
- Special Representative of the Secretary-General Juan Gabriel Valdez assess the ongoing violence in Port-au-Prince, review the force mixture and leadership of MINUSTAH, and consult with the Security Council to determine whether the mandate can be met and security and stability established with the current structure.

*Refugees International advocates Sarah Martin and Peter H. Gantz recently returned from a two-week mission to assess MINUSTAH, the UN peace operation in Haiti.*